


The Border, City, Diaspora: The Physical and Imagined Borders of South Asia

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Abstract

The tussle between borders, identity, and territory continues to dominate politics in postcolonial South Asia. While critical perspectives in International Relations tend to regard borders as increasingly dispersed and vacillated; in South Asia's literature, borders are considered territorially sacrosanct and stringently fixed to their traditional location. Challenging both these perspectives, this thesis questions the diffuse and abstract notion of borders while simultaneously exploring the border beyond the borderland. For this, the thesis adapts the conceptual framework of border as method to analyse narratives, processes, and practices of borders in three locations: the border, the city, and diaspora. I develop this framework of border as method using the interpretive tools of sensitivity, the work of the imagination, and the figure of the stranger to guide as well as draw connections between these seemingly disparate locations. The three cases explicate the relationship between physical and imagined borders by demonstrating how ideas, practices, and narratives of the border converge and diverge at the border, within the nation, and outside the nation. The empirical case studies combine insights from fieldwork, interviews, and observations at the border between (i) India, Bangladesh and Pakistan; (ii) in *chhota* or mini-Pakistans in Mumbai; and (iii) South Asian ethnic enclaves in Birmingham and London. The thesis puts forth a multi-layered argument. Firstly, it argues that there is a need to rethink the way in which we approach the study of borders. For this the thesis argues in favour of studying the border *as* method. This suggests that it is important to study the border on its own terms, by being in dialogue with the border, and by thinking of the border as a way of knowing. Secondly, the thesis demonstrates that the ideational border plays an important role in reproducing the border. The thesis finds that borders in postcolonial South Asia are durable and resilient. Overall, the thesis views borders holistically through an engagement with the three dimensions of the borders i.e. epistemology, ontology, and phenomenology to foreground the rigidity and territoriality of the imagined border.

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Introduction

I.

Imagine you are standing in front of a ten-foot-tall, thick, black fence. Between you and the other side, there are reams of razor-sharp concertina wire. Caution! This fence is electrified. The Border Security Force guard asks you to keep moving. This is no time to stop and stare. In this barren and desolate location, there is an ambient tension. You are at the border between India and Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir, one of the world's most militarised and violent borders. Along this border fence, there are earth mounds created for surveillance. Inside one of these earth mounds, it is dark, dingy, and cold. There is a metal skeleton of a single bed, a stainless-steel tumbler for water, a pair of binoculars, a computer screen, and a hand-drawn map. The *jawan* (officer) on duty here has been working since the previous night. Facing a 10 x10-inch window, the officer stands motionless with his finger on the trigger pointing the gun to an unseen target across the border. There are more than two hundred thousand officers like him on the ground, guarding India's borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh.² This assemblage: the barbed wired fence, the pointed gun, the countless watch-towers, observations points, thermal-imaging devices - all ensure that the border is continually produced and reproduced. *This* is what India and Pakistan have fought four wars over and continue to lose soldiers and civilians nearly every day for. *This* is what the border looks like.

II.

This is India, and that is mini-Pakistan. These demarcations seem unquestioned yet clear in your head. This is post-riot ~~Bombay~~, now Mumbai. You know that there are certain parts of the city that one must not drive through alone at night. Yet, you forget to make the U-

² Guru Aiyar, "As Grievances Go Viral, It's Time to Address What Ails the Security Forces," *The Wire*, January 16, 2017.
(Accessed May 15, 2017)

turn. Apprehensive and partly inquisitive, you carry on. This is also the shorter route home. It is late, there seems to be a traffic jam at 12:30 am. Typical of Mumbai, this is the city that does not sleep after all. The nervousness builds, the cars are not moving. You realise that you are no longer driving through *chhota*, or mini-Pakistan, but you may be stuck in mini-Pakistan. There are no fences, no border guards, yet you have crossed a line. Mahim, an epicentre of the Hindu-Muslim riots continues to casually be referred to as mini-Pakistan. The sacred *dargah* of Makhtum Fakir Ali Paru, a mosque built in the fifteenth century, is on your left and the famous *Usmaan Sulemaan* bakery and *mithaiwala* (Indian sweet shop) is on your right. Unlike the lonely border road, there are festive lights twinkling. There are people on both sides of the road and shops are open. Why are you still afraid? Pedestrians walk past your car, but you double check that the car is locked. Beards, skull-caps, *burkhas*. Familiar yet strange. Who is the stranger here? On edge, you stare at the traffic light. It turns green and you whizz through mini-Pakistan and turn left towards home. You know you gave in to prejudice.

III.

In an Uber from East London to your 'home' in North London, the driver asks whether you mind if he plugs in his own music. You don't object. A favourite Hindi song plays and you immediately ask, 'where are you from?' Sylhet - Bangladesh - London. You introduce yourselves, his name is Asif*. This is the first time you have met a Sylheti. Despite staring at the other side during fieldwork at the border between India and Bangladesh in Sylhet. This is the first time you circumvented the border to meet someone from the other side. In a long conversation about research, visiting Sylhet from the Indian side, and the border, you learn that Bangladesh is where Bangladeshis are - here, in East London. Inevitably the conversation leans to politics. Drawing parallels between the animosity shared between South Asian countries and the Islamophobic narrative in Britain, Asif blames 'the peddling of hate' for 'keeping us apart.' Mid conversation, Asif stops himself and ponders rhetorically, 'what is a London-born Bangladeshi taxi driver going to tell you anyway?' He tells you to read the British poet Akala. As your 'home' approaches, he quickly adds 'in a nutshell, the reason why [there is a strong sense of belonging to Bangladesh in the Tower Hamlets] is because we were brought over here by the British, we were brought to fight

their wars, to build their roads, to bring the spices, introduce all of this – a new way of life into this country. When we came over here we faced nothing but racism, we did not have any sense of identity or belonging. So, we followed our parents, my mother is very strong on her identity of being a Bangladeshi...which is what happened to me, I didn't have a British identity because they didn't want me. Anyone, doesn't matter what age they are, they know when someone doesn't want them or invite them to their so-called clubs. If someone doesn't want you in their tribe, why will you fight to join them? You might as well make your own tribe or join a tribe you already know.'³ You smile, say 'thank you' and leave the cab.

What happens to 'the border' the further one moves away from its original location? What is the connection between these three locations: the border, the city, and diaspora? How do these distinct stories and locations come together? The punctuated forays of the border, or ideas of the border, suggests that 'the border problem' is not just a theoretical debate, but something that frames life worlds. Borders are here: in their visceral, palpable, embodied, lived, and experienced dimension. The border seems to possess an inescapable reality that appears unexpectedly in unexpected locations, albeit in different forms. Imagined, real, material, and metaphorical - the border and ideas of the border seem elastic, yet an invisible thread seems to connect them. These locations: the border; city; and diaspora, are representative fragments that constitute the three pillars of this thesis. This thesis intends to take the reader on a journey to follow 'the border' through its locations, articulations, and fragments. Whether one zooms in on the case of border inhabitants, border guards, marginalised citizens, religious and ethnic minorities, migrants, or second generation diaspora – the border and ideas of the border appear through subtle and stark manifestations of difference, identity, and belonging. Taking borders as a multi-sited problem, the thesis traces continuities between these sites. Through the three empirical cases, the thesis addresses both locations (where) and practices (how). In other words, it shows *where* borders and ideas of borders appear, as well as delving into *how* the practices, processes, and narratives sustain their multiple locations. Rather than rethinking or redefining the

³ Fieldwork notes

border, the aim of this thesis is to think with the border. As such, by being in dialogue with the border, this thesis organically develops in stages and through different forms of borders across these three distinct but connected locations. In other words, the border becomes the laboratory and method through which one can understand the deeply embedded relationship between borders and postcolonial identity in/of South Asia.

This introduction has four sections. The first situates the thesis through its origins in questions pertaining to the idea of South Asia. It situates the border historically in relation to Partition and offers a political overview of the problem of identity and borders in contemporary South Asia. The second section focuses on the different strands of literature on borders across disciplines such as South Asian studies, International Relations (IR), and critical border studies to arrive at the key puzzle that drives this thesis. This third section outlines the research questions that emerges from the contexts of South Asian studies and critical border studies. Consequently, the thesis does not respond to one single question, but a set of questions: i) How do borders of postcolonial South Asia work? ii) What happens to ‘the border’ the further one moves from its original location? And finally, iii) What is the relationship between ideational and material borders? The fourth and final section outline the approach this thesis takes to answer these questions. They explain the conceptual and methodological framework of border as method, positionality, and provide a road map of the structure of this thesis. Before we delve into the core components of this thesis, it is first crucial to situate its origins.

Lines and Lineage: Locating the project

To provide background, this thesis originally began with the aim of studying the idea, or the lack of the idea, of South Asia.⁴ More specifically, it sought to critically examine the

⁴ I would like to clarify, my use of the term South Asia in this thesis refers to the independent states of the Indian subcontinent: India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. However, by this usage of South Asia I do not mean to exclude the official SAARC nations of South Asia, i.e. Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, and Afghanistan. Originally, I was keen to study the entire SAARC region but owing to limitations and constraints of this PhD research, I had to narrow the focus. To reiterate, I do not believe South Asia is defined by these three countries alone.

relationship between identity and the tensions between the postcolonial nation and region by investigating the failure of South Asia as a political project. In a region that shares culture, identity, and history, what prohibited the formation of South Asian regional imaginations? Why has the idea of South Asia failed to gain prominence?⁵ Within South Asian studies, historians Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal advocate a recourse to South Asian history and employ the dialectic between union and partition to better understand the region through its past.⁶ South Asian studies encapsulates various disciplines that foreground the multiple and contested meanings, temporalities, and spatialities of the region.⁷ In International Relations, however, the region has been viewed in relation to the failure of the regional institution, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). SAARC's premature demise is invariably blamed on the territorial dispute and border wars between India and Pakistan. Such ideas portrayed and upheld notions of the region as a 'theatre of war' and conflict.⁸ Furthermore, political tensions between India and Pakistan, particularly after the Kargil War in 1998 and nuclear tests by both states, meant that South Asia became represented as unstable, dangerous, volatile, and as 'nuclear South Asia.'⁹ Accordingly, in the field of IR, the study of South Asia has been dominated by mainstream

⁵ For a discussion on the future of South Asia from the perspectives of thought leaders, academics and policy makers see Adil Najam and Moeed Yusuf, eds., *South Asia 2060: Envisioning Regional Futures* (London: Anthem Press, 2013).

⁶ Ayesha Jalal and Sugata Bose, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998). 11

Similarly, David Ludden questions the inconsistencies between the flows of ancient civilisations in South Asia and its current political predicament

See David Ludden, *India and South Asia: A Short History* (England: Oneworld Books, 2002).

David Ludden, "Maps in the Mind and the Mobility of Asia," *Journal of Asian Studies* 62, no. 3 (2003): 1057–78.

⁷ Notably, a multi-disciplinary special issue encompassing viewpoints from South Asian Studies addresses issues of representation in culture and political uses of South Asia. See Aminah Mohammad-Arif and Blandine Ripert, "Ideas of South Asia: Symbolic Representations and Political Uses," *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal (SAMAJ)* 10 (2014): 1–6.

⁸ Kanti Bajpai, "Pakistan and China in Indian Strategic Thought," *International Journal*, 62, no. 4 (2007): 805–22.

Sandra Destradi, *Indian Foreign and Security Policy in South Asia: Regional Power Strategies* (Oxford & New York: Routledge, 2012). 2

⁹ S. Paul Kapur, "India and Pakistan's Unstable Peace: Why Nuclear South Asia Is Not Like Cold War Europe," *International Security* 30, no. 2 (2005): 127–52. 128

William Walker, "International Nuclear Relations after the Indian and Pakistani Test Explosions," *International Affairs* 74, no. 2 (1998): 505–28.

neorealist theoretical assumptions that tend to employ an India-centric approach.¹⁰ Within this literature, South Asia is primarily studied through the lens of conflict, terrorism, nuclear weapons, security, and the asymmetries between India's rising power status and Pakistan's failure.¹¹ In many ways, these perspectives upheld a tautological argument. The failure of the region was reinforced by the intractability and centrality of the border dispute between India and Pakistan. This fuelled the militarisation of the border, which in turn led to conflict and reiterated the intractability of the border. In examining the idea or the failure of the region in South Asia, the issue of borders is central. The history of the region, and particularly the history of partition, has rendered notions of 'region' and 'regionalism' particularly sensitive.¹² The tension between being a nation and imagining a region is acute at the borders between India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Put differently, the applicability of the concept of South Asia is challenged by 'the two political processes of modernity that introduced a new kind of space-making—nationalism and state formation.'¹³ Intrigued by this conundrum, i.e. the dialectic of unity and partition, the frictions between identity and difference in the region, and the somewhat paralysing centrality of borders, I readjusted my focus from the idea of South Asia to examining the idea of borders in South Asia.

While there are several approaches to interrogate and understand the idea of borders in postcolonial South Asia, let us begin with the history and predominance of Partition. From the outset, let us be clear that beginning with Partition poses problems because it may suggest an overly simplistic and causal relationship between the present and the past. That

¹⁰ Navnita Chadha Behera, *International Relations in South Asia: Search for an Alternative Paradigm* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2008). 93

¹¹ See C. Raja Mohan, "India and the Balance of Power: The Rise of India," *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 4 (2006): 17–32.

Sumit Ganguly, "Will Kashmir Stop India's Rise," *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 4 (2006): 45–57.

Samuel P. Huntington, "The Lonely Superpower," *Foreign Affairs* 78, no. 2 (1999): 35–49.

Bruce Reidel, *Avoiding Armageddon: America, India, and Pakistan to the Brink and Back* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2013).

¹² Aminah Mohammad-Arif, "Introduction, Imaginations and Constructions of South Asia: An Enchanting Abstraction?," *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal (SAMAJ)* 10 (2014): 1–28.

¹³ Sudipta Kaviraj, "A Strange Love of the Land: Identity, Poetry and Politics in the (Un)Making of South Asia," *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal (SAMAJ)* 10 (2014): 1–15. 1

is not the aim here. Neither am I suggesting that we accept the premise that borders are a problem in postcolonial South Asia *because of* Partition.¹⁴ That is somewhat counter-productive and unimaginative. Moreover, one needs to avoid this trap because it perpetuates the mutually reinforcing problem identified above. Instead, I am suggesting that we begin with Partition to understand, analyse, and trace rather than explain the extent, implications, and diverse manifestations of the border problem. I begin with history, critically examining Partition to question the continuities and the effect of Partition beyond just the question of the border dispute. On the one hand, without acknowledging the role and implication of Partition on India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, a study of its borders is incomplete; on the other hand, a fixation on the historical baggage of Partition can be repetitive and be of little analytical value. Remaining critical and reflexive of both these tendencies, let us proceed by asking, what did Partition do? In what ways does Partition continue to linger?

Historically, the conflation of the border as a problem can be traced to when the borders were drawn on August 15, 1947. Independence from the British came at the price of Partition. Often described as unfinished, multiple, artificial, on-going, a wound, amputation, and vivisection – the Partition of the Indian subcontinent is ongoing, a ‘living theme.’¹⁵ Seventy years on, even as I write this introduction, scholars, journalists, and intellectuals on both sides of the border and beyond continue to question the legacy of Partition.¹⁶ New histories are excavated, painful memories retold, and stereotypes upheld.

¹⁴ Typical example of this is Akhilesh Pillalamarri, “Why Are South Asian States so Weak?,” *The Diplomat*, July 22, 2014. (Accessed June 16, 2017)

¹⁵ Ravinder Kaur, *Since 1947: Partition Narratives among Punjabi Migrants of Delhi* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007). 24

¹⁶ The literature on Partition is growing and could well be a sub-field under South Asian studies. Here are a few key texts that examine different aspects, actors, issues.

See Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

Mushirul Hasan, ed., *India's Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilisation* (New Delhi and Abingdon: Oxford University Press, 1994).

For an incisive study on the history of Bengal's borders see Joya Chatterji, *Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947-1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Vazira Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

Tied to Independence and Partition, the violent creation of the border, the separation of families, homes, regions, and languages are the foundation of the newly created India and East and West Pakistan. From this perspective, the problem of borders is considered congenital. In addition to fashioning new nation-states, the creation of the border between India and newly formed East and West Pakistan also created new animosities as India and Pakistan became antonyms. Over time, these animosities have become internalised, nationalised, and bequeathed owing to individual and collective experiences of violence and displacement. This animosity has catalysed different analyses across disciplines and cemented political and public discourses on both sides of the border and beyond.¹⁷

Scholars have interpreted the effects of Partition and the persistence of border issues in several ways. One of the enduring outcomes of Partition is seen to be infusing into ‘the South Asian imagination that ubiquitous imagery of modern politics: the pornography of borders, an imagery that at once excites actually existing and aspiring nationalisms (‘separatisms’) with the fantasy of fulfilment, and must always leave them with permanent disillusion, the melancholia of endless corridors of no man’s land.’¹⁸ To some extent, the

Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh, eds., *The Partition of India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Jayanti Basu, *Reconstructing the Bengal Partition: The Psyche Under a Different Violence* (Kolkata: Samya, 2013). focuses on children at the time of Partition and their experiences with different forms of violence.

For a perspective on the effect of Partition on untouchables and Dalits see Ravinder Kaur, “Narrative Absence: An ‘Untouchable Account’ of Partition Migration,” *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 42, no. 2 (2008): 281–306.

J Sengupta, *Barbed Wire: Borders and Partitions in South Asia* (New Delhi and Abingdon: Routledge, 2012). is a rich anthology of prose and poetry that illuminates the on-going generational experience of Partition, its loss and lament through the medium of artistic and literary engagements. Neeti Nair, *Changing Homelands: Hindu Politics and Partition of India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011). Nair inspired by her own family’s trajectory traces the history of Hindu minority in Punjab during and in the aftermath of Partition.

¹⁷ For example, Mary Lall studies how in India the BJP led government (1998–2004) and in Pakistan the government under General Zia-ul-Haq (1977–1988) rewrote the curricula and changed textbook content to create the ‘other’ to suit their ideology and the politics of the day. See Mary Lall, “Educate to Hate: The Use of Education in the Creation of Antagonistic National Identities in India and Pakistan,” *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 38, no. 1 (2008): 103–19.

¹⁸ Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (London and New York: Penguin Group, 1997). 201

fixation with, or ‘pornography of’, borders is shared by other scholars who interpret the effects of Partition along parallel lines. Moreover, the striking, incomplete nationalisms explain nationalist tendencies of sacralising territory as ‘blood and soil.’¹⁹ Popular nationalist ideations of India as *Bharat Mata* or Mother India too, reinforce the centrality of the body politic, and the imagery of Partition as an amputation. For example, Sankaran Krishna refers to this tendency as ‘cartographic anxiety’, while Ranabir Samaddar explains it as ‘living in Partitioned times.’²⁰

Nearly every analysis in the discipline of ‘border studies’ refers to or begins with Partition, or the legacy of this eccentric geography, particularly when exploring the enclaves along the Bengal borderland.²¹ The on-going nature of Partition, particularly in Kashmir, explicated by the continuum of everyday violence that materially affects and displaces border inhabitants, is also emphasised within anthropological literatures. For example, citing David Gilmartin, Chitrlekha Zutshi claims ‘if Partition is to be seen, as a key moment in a much longer and on-going history linking the state and the arenas of everyday conflict’, then nowhere else is it more palpably evident than in Kashmir.²² Comparing Partition in South Asia and the Middle East, Romola Sanyal and Jason Cons argue that ‘the project of both colonial and post-colonial state making in South Asia have yielded myriad social and spatial exclusions, partial inclusions, and marginalization of citizens and non-citizens. Much contemporary politics in South Asia hinges not around substantive democratic practice, but rather around the biopolitics of inclusion and exclusion.’²³

¹⁹ Jason Cons, “Impasse and Opportunity: Reframing Postcolonial Territory at the India-Bangladesh Border,” *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal (SAMAJ)* 10 (2014): 1–18. Exploring the idea of the nation as Mother, most recently published Sugata Bose, *The Nation as Mother and Other Visions of Nationhood* (New Delhi: Penguin India, 2017).

²⁰ Sankaran Krishna, “Cartographic Anxiety: Mapping the Body Politic in India,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 19, no. 4 (1994): 507–21.

Ranabir Samaddar, *The Nation Form* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2012).

²¹ Jason Cons, *Sensitive Space: Fragmented Territory at the India-Bangladesh Border* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2016).

²² Chitrlekha Zutshi, “An Ongoing Partition: Histories, Borders, and the Politics of Vivisection in Jammu and Kashmir,” *Contemporary South Asia* 23, no. 3 (2015): 266–75. 274

²³ Romola Sanyal and Jason Cons, “Geographies at the Margins: Borders in South Asia - an Introduction,” *Political Geography* 35 (2013): 5–13. 6

Contemporary notions of exclusion and inclusion are not dissociated from their historical genesis. Consequently, the legacy of Partition tends to pervade the study of postcolonial South Asia and presents a dilemma. One can neither deny the effect of Partition, nor can one drown in the historical baggage of ‘Partition syndrome.’²⁴ Furthermore, in relation to the underlying India centrism of these analyses of Partition, it is important to acknowledge that Partition has multiple, contested, and diverse meanings for different postcolonial states but also variations between regions within India like Bengal or Ladakh.²⁵ Therefore, scholars must avoid grand, singular, and sweeping narratives of Partition as its rich history is best left contested, contextual, and fragmented. That said, for this thesis, there are still some overarching features of Partition that one ought to consider.

Like an autoimmune disease, this congenital problem of the border is most pronounced in Kashmir, where it has been manifest in wars, militancy, terrorism, and counter-insurgency. The issue of Kashmir is vast, complex, and tends to overshadow scholarship and politics in and of the region. To understand borders as overly centred by and determined through Partition, a military and security centric focus on Kashmir tends to obfuscate the how borders work in terms of shaping identities and politics. Such an approach tends to silence and erase the dialogues and relations that the border weaves within society, politics, and economy. This securitised focus on Kashmir, however, has led the border between India

²⁴ Mustapha Kamal Pasha et al., “Kashmir 1947: Burdens of the Past, Options for the Future -four Perspectives,” *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 36, no. 1 (1998): 92–123.

For a perspective on the case of Partition migration in Bengal see MD. Mahbubar Rahman and Willem van Schendel, “‘I Am Not a Refugee’: Rethinking Partition Migration,” *Modern Asian Studies* 37, no. 3 (2003): 551–84.

For an example see, ‘Why do Bangladeshis Seem Indifferent to Partition?’ August 16, 2017

It is equally necessary to outline that the experience, interpretation and effect of Partition across India, Pakistan and Bangladesh has been varied. For instance, among Bangladeshis there is a sense of indifference towards Partition as it does not conjure the same feelings or memories as it does for perhaps India and Pakistan. For Bangladeshi August 15 is more associated with the murder of the Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding father of the Bangladeshi state in 1975.

K. Anis Ahmed, “Why Do Bangladeshis Seem Indifferent to Partition?,” *The New York Times*, August 16, 2017.

²⁵ For an overview of Partition in different parts of India that diversify our understandings on locations and their subsequent implications, see Urvashi Butalia, ed., *Partition: The Long Shadow* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2015).

and Pakistan to be viewed as one of the most violent and dangerous borders in the world. This view is buttressed by the accelerating militarisation of the border. For instance, the floodlit, electrified fence between India and Pakistan radiates a distinct orange glow visible even from space.²⁶ Brighter than some un-electrified cities and villages in the region, this orange flame depicts the architecture of division in postcolonial South Asia. In the wider world, disputed borders make South Asian states look ‘weak’, with ‘frayed sovereignty’.²⁷ The incompleteness of the border, the consequent violence and insecurity also appears in mutated forms. The hypersensitivity associated with the publication of an ‘incorrect’ map is displayed in international publications like *The Economist* as well as in official documents.²⁸ For instance, the new immigration forms created by the 2014 Modi government rank incorrect maps of India at the top of the list of prohibited items. Ranabir Samaddar explains, ‘maps are a barred subject. They invite suspicion. They essentialize differences, but precisely because they essentialize, they remain sacrosanct, inviolable. They cannot be discussed. Because they represent anxiety, the less discussed they are the better.’²⁹ The fragility of the maps is matched by the fragility of the nation on both sides of the border, a fragility exhibited when Kashmiri students are charged with sedition for celebrating Pakistan’s cricket victory, or a Pakistani fan of the Indian cricket captain Virat Kohli faces imprisonment for his misplaced affection.³⁰ In this way, maps and the fragility of the nation contribute to the political sensitivity of borders, particularly in India.

This thesis also recognises the importance of engaging with the issue of borders in South Asia from a perspective that is not fogged by Partition and Kashmir. It is necessary to also

²⁶ “India-Pakistan Border at Night,” *Visible Earth: NASA*, accessed May 15, 2017, <https://visibleearth.nasa.gov/view.php?id=86725>. (Accessed May 15, 2017)

²⁷ Willem van Schendel, “The Wagah Syndrome: Territorial Roots of Contemporary Violence in South Asia,” in *Violence and Democracy in India*, ed. Amrita Basu and Srirupa Roy (Calcutta, 2007), 36–82. 42

Also, important to note, India has disputed borders with Pakistan, China and until 2015 with Bangladesh.

²⁸ “The World’s Most Dangerous Border,” *The Economist*, May 2011. (Accessed May 18, 2017)

²⁹ Samaddar, *The Nation Form*. 175

³⁰ PTI, “Virat Kohli Fan in Pakistan Faces 10 Year Jail Term for Hoisting India Flag,” *Indian Express*, January 28, 2016. (Accessed May 15, 2017)

think about the wider and deeper implications of such a focus when measured against the politics, polarisation, and existing narratives in/of the region. It underlines the deeper question of how scholars respond to the responsibility of producing knowledge about such a context? How do we provide alternative vantage points to the tired and overplayed security narratives in South Asia? Reflecting this responsibility, this study strives to engage with postcolonial borders in/of South Asia to go beyond the conventional and restrictive focus on Kashmir, security threats, and nuclear war that fixates the academic and popular gaze. It is vital to reclaim the study of South Asia's borders from military specialists and the intelligence community, and to overcome the academic neglect of South Asia's borderlands.³¹ This move, however, should not eclipse the materiality and political realities of borders between India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The territorial sanctity and sovereignty of the Westphalian state has manifested itself in the preoccupation with borders in postcolonial South Asia, with the borders between India and Pakistan, and India and Bangladesh demarcated, territorialised, and securitised in some of the most isolated and barren locations. At an altitude of 18,000 – 22, 000 feet, in the Siachen glacier, only three percent of the army's casualties are due to enemy fire, the rest succumbing to the weather and terrain.³² Here, dead soldiers' bones must be broken to accommodate the body in small *Cheeta* helicopters.³³ The human cost of maintaining and securitising the borders cannot be measured by sheer numbers alone. Over the last three years, there has been a gradual rise in the number of casualties at the border between India and Pakistan.³⁴ The border continues to sever relations between families and friends across the border. For instance, the WhatsApp group "Hum Sb Kb Milenge" (When will we meet), created by journalist Musa Chulungkha in Skardu, Gilgit-Baltistan (Pakistan), has more than 110 members from both sides of the Line of Control (LoC). The group brings together relatives, well-wishers

Gardiner Harris, "Kashmiri Students Briefly Charged With Sedition for Rooting for Wrong Cricket Team," *The New York Times*, March 6, 2014. (Accessed May 15, 2017)

³¹ Schendel, "The Wagah Syndrome: Territorial Roots of Contemporary Violence in South Asia." 46

³² Samaddar, *The Nation Form*. 174

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Abhishek Waghmare, "Indian Army's Death Toll of 64 in 2016 Highest in Six Years: 31 Terrorists Killed This Year," *Firstpost*, September 21, 2016. (Accessed June 16, 2017)

and residents of the villages that suffered in the war of 1971.³⁵ Likewise, the effect of the border violence and war on the historical sites, places of worship, tangible and intangible history and culture is something that cannot be measured.³⁶

The coloniality of borders in South Asia is not limited to the imposition of the Westphalian straightjacket, but percolates deeper into the psyche. As Ashis Nandy suggests, ‘colonialism is mostly a game of categories.’³⁷ The creation of borders results in the invention, reification, and objectification of categories.³⁸ Categories are normalised through practices of daily life, including categories of identity, religion, and citizenship. On forms, censuses, and identification cards, we define and self-identify through the narrow parameters of either-or. Borders have created boxes, delineations, divisions, and distance in postcolonial South Asia. There also exists an inescapable material reality that frames politics and identity by the mere drawing of borders. The emergence of postcolonial, modern states was hinged on the drawing of ‘nice clean lines’ that territorially divided the Indian subcontinent based on alleged irreconcilable religious differences.³⁹ This notion of irreconcilability and discrepancy between identity, territory, and nation remains problematic and unforgiving. Historian Gyanendra Pandey aptly identifies the key implications of Partition for identity. He notes, ‘Sikhs and Muslims and Hindus were all redefined by the process of Partition: as butchers, or as devious others; as untrustworthy and anti-national; but perhaps fundamentally, as Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus alone.’⁴⁰

This relationship between identity and borders also unfolds in the slowly worsening relations between religious communities - Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs: divided families,

³⁵ Shubhangi Swarup, “A Portrait of a Village on the Border,” *Live Mint*, August 11, 2017. (Accessed August 15, 2017)

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009). 117

³⁸ Bernard Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).

³⁹ R.B.J Walker and Sankaran Krishna, “Partition: On the Discriminations of Modernity,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 27, no. 4 (2002): 143–46.146

⁴⁰ Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).16

hyphenated identities, eccentric cartography; the desperation for Kashmir; the plight of Kashmiris; communalism; riots; minority/majority demographics; the Muslim card, virulent Indian and Pakistani nationalism; prejudice and hate. The shackles of colonial oppression and British subjugation were arguably replaced by the binds of communal violence, division, and minority politics in the region. The question of identity continues to frame much of domestic and international politics in South Asia. In a context where language, culture, and history is shared, territorial borders have become instrumental in outlining the limits of belonging, identity, and the nation-state. However, the inseparability of religious and national identity has far reaching effects. For instance, the spectre of Partition is also routinely resurrected. 1947 is recalled during spates of communal violence - during 1984 Hindu-Sikh riots, the Hindu-Muslim riots in 1992/1993, or the Gujarat riots in 2002. Born out of reactions – to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s assassination by her Sikh bodyguards in 1984, the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992, or the alleged fire lit by Muslims on the train carrying Hindu *yatris* or pilgrims in 2002– the narratives and violence of Partition are re-cycled. Even in scholarly practice, the violence during the Hindu-Sikh riots in 1984 catalysed the second wave of Partition literature that shifted the focus from the level of the political elite to the experience, trauma, and memory of the individual.⁴¹ With reference to the Gujarat pogrom, Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi’s ethnographic research revealed that as per the logic of Partition, ‘Partition eliminated the need for Muslim recognition in India – by territorial displacement, India no longer had to deal internally with the demands of Muslims.’⁴² This translated into the spatial organisation of the city, and was reaffirmed by the fact that ‘Muslims were given a separate state (*emne alag api*).’⁴³ Put differently, post-riot Gujarat still seems to draw connections between the

⁴¹ Urvashi Butalia recounts that in the aftermath of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s assassination, refugees from 1947 recounted ‘We didn’t think it could happen to us in our own country... this is like Partition again’

Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1998). 5

⁴² Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi, *Pogrom in Gujarat: Hindu Nationalism and Anti-Muslim Violence in India* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012).

⁴³ Ibid. 236

spatial organisation of the city, belonging, and the interpretation of Partition as the creation of space for Muslims *outside* India.

Outside South Asia, Partition lives on. It is evoked when second and third generation British South Asians trace their lineage or journey to Britain.⁴⁴ The narrative of Partition, particularly the tropes of familial honour and shame are regurgitated to prohibit inter-faith marriages between Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims in cities like Birmingham and London. Love-Jihad⁴⁵, whether in South Asia or in Britain, the narrative share a resemblance.⁴⁶ Additionally, the memory and retelling of the experience of Partition has travelled in diasporic familial narratives and oral histories of South Asians abroad. ‘The Partition Trail: Voices from 1947’, a recent project by Birmingham based Sampad Arts organisation, traces the continuities of these journeys. The project curators suggest that ‘over the course of the decades that followed, prompted by a variety of factors, large swathes of people made the move from India and the newly created Pakistan, particularly from the divided state of Punjab, to settle in Birmingham and the West Midlands. Census records build a picture of the indirect influence of the Partition on patterns of migration and settlement in the region, which can still be recognised today.’⁴⁷ Interestingly, during the 70th Anniversary of India and Pakistan’s independence in August 2017, the British media coverage commemorating this event garnered negative reactions from members of the British South Asian community who challenged the account. Jasdev Singh Rai, director of the Sikh Human Rights Forum stated, ‘this Partition focus is because they want to feel good about themselves. Why isn’t the British media exposing British culpability and gross incompetence in the violence? The

⁴⁴ Pablo Bose, “Dilemmas of Diaspora: Partition, Refugees, and the Politics of ‘Home,’” *Refugee Diasporas and Transnationalism* 23, no. 1 (2006): 58–68.

⁴⁵ Love-Jihad is a common term used to explain inter-faith marriages. This term is used particularly when a Muslim boy is seen to deliberately ‘entrap’ a Hindu or Sikh girl for marriage with the underlying intention of converting her.

⁴⁶ Aman Sethi, “‘Love Jihad’ in India and One Man’s Quest to Prevent It,” *The Guardian*, January 29, 2015. (Accessed August 2, 2017)

Ruchira Sharma, “Love Jihad: Sikh Parents’ Fear of Their Children Dating Muslims,” *Vice*, 2017. (Accessed August 11, 2017)

⁴⁷ “The Partition Trail: Voices of 1947,” *Sampad: South Asian Arts*, 2017, <http://sampad.org.uk/the-partition-trail-voices-of-1947/>. (Accessed May 15, 2017)

Partition violence is a greater reflection of the shambolic, racist, and cruel colonial rule that thrived on dividing rather than co-opting local populations.⁴⁸ Rather than being forgotten, the influence of Partition on migration journeys continues to unfold.

Away from the physical border, the issue of the border is prominent in Indian news, and the media reports, which recount daily incidents and occurrences of violence. After the 26/11⁴⁹ terrorist attacks in Mumbai, the vulnerability of the city's coastal borders became a focus of attention because the terrorists travelled from Pakistan on inconspicuous fishing boats. The security framework used at airports i.e. x-rays, baggage checks, and extensive 'stop and search' was implemented mandatorily in public spaces like cinemas, hotels, and shopping malls. The practices of the border became everyday practice. Pakistani novelist Mohammed Hanif recounts that, post-26/11, the borders were implemented as Pakistanis in Indian hospitals were forced to leave. He recalls that 'almost all the passengers returning to Pakistan had been dragged out of their hospital beds. Some of them were in their hospital gowns, others clutching plastic bags full of medicines and half-used IVs, yellow tubes hanging from their arms.'⁵⁰ Similarly, after the Pakistani terror attack on Indian military bases in September 2016 and India's subsequent surgical strikes, Mumbai-based political parties Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) and Shiv Sena deemed the use of Pakistani actors in Bollywood films 'anti-national.' The MNS demanded an official public apology from an Indian director/producer for using a Pakistani actor in his upcoming film. This issue gained regional and national prominence as the unrelated issue of Pakistani actors in Indian cinema and cross-border terrorism were conflated. The issue was only resolved after

⁴⁸ Prasun Sonwalkar, "India@70: Overdose of Partition in UK Media Irks Indians," *Hindustan Times*, August 14, 2017. (Accessed August 17, 2017)

⁴⁹ The Mumbai terrorist attacks took place on 26th November 2008 also referred to as 26/11 and lasted for 60 hours ending on 29th November 2008 killing 180 people. Ten Pakistani Terrorists held the city hostage and undertook eleven coordinated shootings and bomb attacks across two five-star hotels, a train station, hospital, a tourist bar and a Jewish home in South Mumbai. 26/11 is considered as the second worst terrorist attack after 9/11.

⁵⁰ Mohammed Hanif, "The Partition Goes on: A Pakistani Perspective," *Al Jazeera*, August 15, 2017. (Accessed August 15, 2017)

the director was made to donate five million rupees to the Indian Army.⁵¹ In these convoluted ways, national borders are brought into the city to border and exclude Pakistanis.⁵² The solution to the problem became not just increasing security at the border, but also banning of Pakistani actors from Indian cinema and cricketers from the Indian Premier League. From cricket tournaments to Bollywood, new borders were created for Pakistanis. Further still, the effects of events like riots, wars, and border violence in South Asia perpetuate hostilities within South Asian diasporic communities in Britain.⁵³ As these illustrations suggest, there is an underlying relationship between where the border is located and what the border does that demands further exploration. This presents a significant gap in the way that the borders in and of South Asia have been studied. Overall, the above discussion provides an overview of the historical and political milieu in which contemporary South Asian borders and identity are located. This understanding of the context helps situate the thesis more broadly and explains the various factors that make borders a delicate yet persistent issue in postcolonial South Asia. In the next section, I briefly review the literature on borders across disciplines to identify the limitations in the literature and the primary questions that drive this thesis.

Questions emerging from the literature

Bearing South Asia's political context in mind, this section explains how borders are interpreted, explained, and analysed in academic literature. To overcome the limitations of

⁵¹ Krishna Kumar, "Shiv Sena Suffers from BJP-MNS Deal That Clears Karan Johar's Ae Dil Hai Mushkil," *The Economic Times*, October 24, 2016. (Accessed August 21, 2017)

⁵² The Shiv Sena workers also physically intimidated and attacked Sudheendra Kulkarni with black ink. Kulkarni is an activist and chairman of a Mumbai-based public policy think-tank, his face was blackened for inviting and hosting a book launch of a former Pakistani minister in Mumbai. This incident illustrated the consequences for those who try to challenge/subvert the borders of Mumbai
'Shiv Sena strikes again: blackens Sudheendra Kulkarni's face to protest ex Pak minister's book launch' October 12, 2015

"Shiv Sena Strikes Again: Blackens Sudheendra Kulkarni's Face to Protest Ex- Pak Minister's Book Launch," *First Post*, October 12, 2015. (Accessed August 12, 2017)

⁵³ Apurba Kundu, "The Ayodhya aftermath: Hindu versus Muslim Violence in Britain," *Immigrants & Minorities: Historical Studies in Ethnicity, Migration and Diaspora* 13, no. 1 (1994): 26–47.

security-centric and distant approaches to South Asia's borders in IR, I initially turned to the anthropology literature on borders in South Asia. These anthropological perspectives revealed an alternative picture. Contrary to the rigid and overly-militarised perspective on the border in IR, scholars of 'the borderland literature' fundamentally challenge the methodological nationalism of the state. Rather than taking borders, states, and border inhabitants as givens it is critical to view them as processes.⁵⁴ Anthropologists offer a rich, complex, and layered picture of the borders between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.⁵⁵ Countering securitised perspectives, this literature provides thick descriptions, demystifying and enlivening our understanding of borders as dynamic spaces.

The empirically rich work of anthropologists has revealed the nuances, textures, and liminality of borderlands. For instance, Willem van Schendel argues that the Bengal Borderland is far from a 'sleepy backwater in a lost corner of the world...it is a dynamic site of transnational reconfiguration, a hotbed of re-scaling, and an excellent place to help us shake off a state-centric social-imagination.'⁵⁶ In this vein, this literature demonstrates the relationship between the state, borders, and violence in South Asia. Borders appear repressive, but they are also crossed, violated, and subverted. This literature's focus on border inhabitants also brings into question the simultaneous marginality and centrality of borders. The anthropology of border literature is especially useful for illustrating how the border as a political line translates on the ground; it shows that the border is not merely a line dividing two states, but a complex 'licit but illegal' reality. Moreover, this literature presents detailed insight into the micro-politics of the border whereby borders gain more meaning than just barbed-wire and symbols of animosity. The work on the Bengal

⁵⁴ David Gellner, ed., *Borderland Lives in Northern South Asia: Non-State Perspectives* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013). 5

⁵⁵ Ravina Aggarwal, *Beyond Lines of Control: Performance and Politics on the Disputed Borders of Ladakh, India* (Durham and London,: Duke University Press, 2004).
Delwar Hussain, *Boundaries Undermined: The Ruins of Progress on the Indo-Bangladesh Border*, (London: Hurst Publishers, 2013).

Gellner, *Borderland Lives in Northern South Asia: Non-State Perspectives*.

⁵⁶ Willem van Schendel, *The Bengal Borderland: Beyond State and Nation in South Asia* (London: Anthem Press, 2005). 11

borderland sheds light on the continuation of cross-border familial and trade ties.⁵⁷ Similarly, studying Kashmir, Martin Sökefeld broadens the literature's conventional preoccupations on the LOC and the insurgency in the area, by analysing boundaries and movements, and their meanings and effects on social and political life.⁵⁸ These perspectives on borders in South Asia helped shape the direction of the empirical research I conducted, by highlighting the value of studying borders intimately. Despite its substantive richness, some limitations remain in this literature, particularly in the conventional conceptualisations of the border employed by these scholars. Aside from two studies, Sara H Smith's work on intimate geopolitics in Leh and Anastasia Piliavsky's work on the administrative borders in the Rajasthan, the borderland literature analysed the border using its traditional definition and locations.⁵⁹

Within the field of IR, although borders are a key concept that structure and frame the international system, scholars claim that neither modern political theory nor IR theory has succeeded in theorising the problems posed by borders and identity.⁶⁰ To a large extent, the discussion about borders has been dominated by politics in the West. These dominant perspectives have postulated that sovereignty is waning. The post-Westphalian period, within which state sovereignty is either finished or becoming ever less relevant, has

⁵⁷ Malini Sur, "Indelible Lines: Revisiting Borders and Partitions in Modern South Asia," *Mobility in History* 6 (2015): 70–78.

Malini Sur, "Through Metal Fences: Material Mobility and the Politics of Transnationality at Borders," *Mobilities*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2012, Pp. 70–89," *Mobilities* 8, no. 1 (2012): 70–89.

Sahana Ghosh, "Relative Intimacies: Belonging and Difference in Transnational Families," *Economic and Political Weekly, Special Issue: Exploring Borderlands In South Asia* 11, no. 15 (2017): 45–52.

⁵⁸ Martin Sökefeld, "Introduction: Jammu and Kashmir - Boundaries and Movements," *Contemporary South Asia* 23, no. 3 (2015): 251–65. 253

⁵⁹ Sara H Smith, "The Domestication of Geopolitics: Buddhist-Muslim Conflict and the Policing of Marriage and the Body in Ladakh, India," *Geopolitics* 14 (2009): 197–218.

Anastasia Piliavsky, "Borders without Borderlands: On the Social Reproduction of State Demarcation in Rajasthan," in *Borderland Lives in Northern South Asia*, ed. David Gellner (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

Sara H Smith, "'In the Past, We Ate from One Plate': Memory and the Border in Leh, Ladakh," *Political Geography* 35 (2013): 47–59.

⁶⁰ Chris Brown, "Borders and Identity in International Political Theory," in *Identities, Borders, Orders: Rethinking International Relations Theory*, ed. Mathias Albert, David Jacobson, and Yosef Lapid (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001). 117

seemingly arrived.⁶¹ At the end of the Cold War, and after the subsequent fall of the Berlin Wall, the simmering narrative of globalisation, and the emergence and expansion of the European Union,⁶² created a context in which it appeared that the territorial trap of IR was loosening.⁶³ The post-national political imaginary appeared to herald the end of borders and a new borderless world.⁶⁴ Scholars from South Asia also prodded and dissected the (im)probability of the post-national condition in South Asia.⁶⁵ Within IR, there was also an on-going debate about whether borders were obsolete or here to stay.⁶⁶ In this context, it appeared that border problems were a particularly postcolonial or non-Western issue.⁶⁷ To some extent, the fixation with, and persistence of, border issues and disputes has often been relegated as a ‘third world problem’ with sovereignty, a lingering effect of decolonisation, or what Itty Abraham calls a ‘darker nation struggle.’⁶⁸ While, viewed from the European perspective, borders appeared obsolete, the post-9/11 world was yielding new landscapes

⁶¹ Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (New York: Zone Books, 2010). 22

⁶² Hastings Donnan and Thomas M. Wilson, *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State*, (Oxford & New York: Berg, 1999). 1

⁶³ John Agnew, “The Territorial Trap: The Geographical Assumptions of International Relations Theory,” *Review of International Political Economy* 1, no. 1 (1994): 53–80.

⁶⁴ William Walter, “Mapping Schengenland: Denaturalising the Border,” *Environment and Planning* 20, no. 5 (2002): 564–80.

⁶⁵ See the special issue Malathi de Alwis et al., “The Postnational Condition,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 44, no. 10 (2009): 1–77.

⁶⁶ Gearóid Ó’Tuathail, “Borderless Worlds? Problematising Discourses of Deterritorialisation,” *Geopolitics* 4, no. 2: Geopolitics at the end of the Twentieth Century (1999): 139–54.

Alexander C. Diener and Joshua Hagen, “Theorizing Borders in a ‘Borderless World’: Globalization, Territory and Identity,” *Geography Compass* 3, no. 3 (2009): 1196–1216.

David Newman and Anssi Paasi, “Fences and Neighbours in the Postmodern World: Boundary Narratives in Political Geography,” *Progress in Human Geography* 22, no. 2 (1998): 186–207.

Victor Prescott, “Borders in a Borderless World,” *Geopolitics* 4, no. 2: Geopolitics at the end of the Twentieth Century (1999): 263–73.

⁶⁷ Mark E. Debham and Mark Owen Lombardi, eds., *Perspectives on Third-World Sovereignty: The Postmodern Paradox* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1996).

⁶⁸ Itty Abraham, *How India Became Territorial: Foreign Policy, Diaspora and Geopolitics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014). 4

see A. I Asiawaju, “Borderlands in Africa: A Comparative Research Perspective with Particular Reference to Western Europe,” *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 8, no. 2 (1993): 1–12.

of security.⁶⁹ Most literature seemed dedicated to securitisation and threat without demystifying borders or analysing the deeper implications of these new frameworks.

These changes in the political reality of the border and the new security landscapes have also sparked the creation of sub-fields like critical border studies. This intervention offered avenues for developing the border as a concept in IR. Drawing from political geography, sociology, and political theory; critical border studies scholars have sought to widen the conceptual parameters of the border to reflect changes in the global political landscape. Questioning traditional ‘lines in the sand’ views of the border, they sought to find alternative imaginaries to analyse it. For instance, Mark Salter proposes the suture or ‘/’ rather than the classic inside/outside divide.⁷⁰ Further still, border studies has witnessed a shift from attention on ‘the border’ to ‘bordering’. Scholars have sought to explore the border as a verb through the lens of bordering practices. Chris Rumford has developed the notion of ‘borderwork’ to encapsulate the role of citizens in participating in everyday bordering practices.⁷¹ These changes also marked the inclusion of newer actors, locations, and practices in the study of borders. These changes have not only dislocated the border but have also ushered in the possibility of its diversified understandings.

While these changes are positive in terms of reinventing and vigorously questioning the border as a concept, there are also some issues that have emerged from this move. First, the current literature is focused on European and Western borders. Despite the centrality of borders in the decolonisation process in terms of creating newly independent nation-states, postcolonial perspectives are relatively absent from critical border studies.⁷² As a result, engagement between this new literature and South Asia has been limited to the application

⁶⁹ Reece Jones, *Border Walls: Security and the War on Terror in the United States, India and Israel* (New York and London: Zed Books, 2012).

⁷⁰ Mark Salter, “Theory of the /: The Suture and Critical Border Studies,” in *Critical Border Studies: Broadening and Deepening the “Lines in the Sand” Agenda*, ed. Noel Parker and Nick Vaughan-Williams (Oxon and New York, 2014), 8–29.

⁷¹ Chris Rumford, *Cosmopolitan Borders* (England & USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

⁷² Barring the example of Antia Mato Bouzas’s work on Kashmir, see Bouzas, “Mixed Legacies in Contested Borderlands: Skardu and the Kashmir Dispute.”

of new concepts to this case. This is a problem because the non-West remains a space of application rather than conceptual invention. Second, these newer understandings of the border tend to be dominated by discussions about sophisticated technologies, the privatisation of border security, detention centres, and algorithmic and technological changes to the border configuration.⁷³ Third, the emphasis on concepts within critical border studies has side-lined empirical and substantive investigation. The lack of methodological engagement with the border has caused an imbalance between studying the border as a concept, political reality, and site of research. This has led to something of an abstraction of the border. Finally, it appears that critical border scholars are yet to catch-up to the emerging disjuncture in interpreting the relationship among borders, identity, and difference. It is imperative to state that far from becoming obsolete, borders have been resurgent, even in the Western context.⁷⁴ The refugee crisis on Europe's doorstep, debates about immigration and the eventuality of Brexit, and President Donald Trump's cacophonous and repetitive chants of "Build that Wall! Build that Wall!" have put the border back in business. Even outside the European and American context, Israel has spent \$350 million building another fence with Egypt that serves a completely different purpose: stopping the flow of African migrants, most of them impoverished Muslims and Christians.⁷⁵

Since 2015, work has started on more new borders around the world than at any other point in modern history; approximately sixty-three new border fences/walls are being built.⁷⁶ Ironically, most of the new walls are being erected within the European Union, which until recently was nearly borderless.⁷⁷ I would argue that the reasons for building these borders are not just about prohibiting refugees from entering Europe, but run deeper. For Rudolf

⁷³ Most recently see Reece Jones et al., "Interventions on the State of Sovereignty at the Border," *Political Geography* 59 (2017): 1–10.

Gabriel Popescu, "Biometric Technologies and the Automation of Identity and Space," in *Handbook on Geographies of Technology*, ed. Barney Warf (UK and USA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2017), 458–71.

⁷⁴ Samuel Granados et al., "Fenced Out," *The Washington Post*, 2016. (Accessed May 15, 2017)

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Federspiel, an Austrian right-wing politician who campaigns in favour of building a border near the Brenner pass, the issue of the border is not just about in/security. Federspiel states, ‘nobody here in Austria wants to close the border. We don’t want to build a fence between the two nations. But if this stream, this crowd, these thousands of North Africans are coming from the south, we must close. You know, it’s a different culture. Mostly, these people are Muslims. We are Roman Catholics here.’⁷⁸ The changing border politics on the ground demonstrates borders have never been just an issue for the non-West. More importantly, the security lens through which the border is framed, camouflages the underlying fear and hostility towards the Other, in this case the figure of the Muslim. In the post-9/11 context, the critical border studies literature has been predominantly focused on borders, security practices, and sovereignty. The main point to establish here is that the creation of borders is *as* reflective of identity politics as it is of in/security and migration. Although IR scholars have discussed the relationship between identity and borders, it seems that the resurgence of identity politics and the border has yet to be fully investigated in critical border studies.

These inadequacies in the literature brings us to the core of the problem that this thesis addresses. This problem emerges out of two contexts that I have brought together thus far. The first context is South Asia, where the inconsistencies between the border as political reality and the literature on borders in South Asia is problematic. Even though there is an interest in the borderland as a space, conceptually the border remains a line that divides two nation-states. Even while considering the historical and postcolonial context, the effects of the border beyond its traditional location remain uncharted and disconnected. The second context for this research project is critical border studies. While the debates on sovereignty, border technology, and security are meaningful, and even though critical border studies takes questions of conceptualising the border seriously, there are a few problems outlined above. The questions that emerge from the limitations- and my frustrations with- the critical border studies literature is the absence of substantively tracing *how* borders work. More so, aside from technology and security practices, what makes

⁷⁸ Ibid.

borders rigid and mobile? It is not adequate to blame history, or use the advent of technology, or lens of sovereignty to broaden the locations and limits of studies of borders. In fact, it would appear as though these perspectives present the two poles of the problem. Thus, focussing on this apparent gap in the middle, between the way borders are treated by South Asian studies and how they are conceptualised within critical border studies, this thesis seeks to create a dialogue between the two. Overall, I seek to move from the specific, i.e. South Asia- towards the problem of borders more generally.

Approach and Aims

This thesis poses a set of questions i) How do borders work in postcolonial South Asia? ii) What happens to ‘the border’ the further one moves away its original location? And finally, iii) What is the relationship between ideational and material borders? To address these questions, this thesis encourages dialogue between postcolonial South Asia, its borders and issues of identity, and the current literature on the concept of the border in critical border studies. Drawing on the strengths of both positions: from South Asian studies, the richness of the border as a space; its complexity; and the value of substantive engagement with the border as a lived and created everyday reality, and from critical border studies, its innovative conceptualisation of the border. A synergetic approach could be mutually beneficial, mitigating the limitations of both positions. In other words, the conceptual innovation in critical border studies can help to overcome the conventional definition of the border understood as the line dividing two states held by South Asian studies. Equally, the absence of thorough methodological and empirical engagement and Eurocentrism of critical border studies can be tackled by a thorough study that begins with the border on the ground. As this introduction explains, the specificity of the border as a manifestation of the postcolonial nation-state in South Asia requires close examination using newer understandings of the border. To be clear, this synergy does not suggest an application of the new conceptualisations of the border *to* the case of South Asia. South Asia *is not* ‘the case’, but the foundation that critically uses and responds to developments in critical border studies. Overall, this synergetic approach is underlined by efforts to disrupt the border: its fixity and location within South Asia, and conversely, stabilise or impose a certain sense

of identifiability to the seemingly vague, dispersed, ‘undecidability’ of the border in critical border studies.⁷⁹

Viewing borders as a multi-sited problem enables one to draw connections between locations as well as identify and analyse different forms of the border. It also enables one to pose the question of the unity of the concept of the border. Through a multi-sited approach, we can comprehend *how*, *where*, and in *what* ways the border moves conceptually and substantively. Moreover, thinking of borders as a multi-sited problem allows us to think of borders in their totality and as a continuum. Rather than simply suggesting that borders shift or move, by beginning with the premise that borders *are* multi-sited in their effect and practices, we demystify the abstractness of the vacillated and dispersed border. To that end, this thesis takes the question of location more seriously. A multi-sited approach allows not only ideas of the border to disperse, but also to be traced and identified. The question of location is worthwhile because a sensitivity to location leads to ‘a productive contamination of the purity of empty universalist categories and challenge their claim to speak about everywhere from nowhere.’⁸⁰ This claim to speak about ‘everywhere from nowhere’ is precisely what appears an issue. Choosing three locations displaces the rigidity of the border location and allows for a certain degree of movement in South Asian studies and simultaneously it brings specificity to the border in critical border studies. By bringing together the global, local, and transnational, the thesis pays attention to the inherent multiplicity of scales of borders, but also the ways in which the border is distorted and mutated across locations and scales.

This thesis undertakes a holistic approach to the study of borders, engaging with the border through its three dimensions.⁸¹ I identify these as epistemology, ontology, and

⁷⁹ Noel Parker and Nick Vaughan-Williams, “Lines in the Sand? Towards an Agenda for Critical Border Studies,” *Geopolitics* 14, no. 3 (2009): 582–87.

⁸⁰ Nivedita Menon, “Thinking through the Postnation,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 44, no. 10 (2009): 70–77. 70-1

⁸¹ For example, L.H.M Ling in her article undertakes an alternative and holistic approach to the India-China border problem. She applies border therapy and trialectical epistemology inspired by ancient Daoism.

phenomenology. This means paying close attention to the border as an academic concept, a political reality, and as a site of investigation. Borders exists within multiple domains that are to be brought into dialogue to enrich our current understanding of borders and avoid focusing only on any one or two of these domains. Furthermore, in studying the relationship between borders and identity, this thesis also strives to problematise binaries and dichotomised categories that emerge from borders. In this sense, it is important to critically assess the effects of borders in terms of what L.H.M Ling calls an ‘emancipation from Westphalia’s border-binaries so we can arrive at a more democratic, less violent post-Westphalian world politics.’⁸² This thesis aims to understand the deeper implications of border-binaries by examining forms of everyday multi-layered exclusions that are preserved using binaries and dualisms at the border, in the city, and in diasporic space. In what ways do categories of identity like black/white, Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi, Muslim/Hindu, British/Asian/Muslim create borders or ‘divide and conquer?’⁸³ By questioning conceptual pairings and binaries like material/ideational, lived/symbolic, violent/banal, the thesis questions the limitations and the efficacy of such categories. In what ways do these binaries work but also fail? Concurrently, it is crucial to recognise that border-binaries are not just exclusionary in their horizontal dimension, but also perpetuate hierarchies, both of which are dimensions that this thesis closely examines.⁸⁴

Finally, in this thesis I do not work with a singular definition of borders, but understand borders and bordering practices through a wider lens. It understands borders as processes, practices, and narratives of division and difference. Since this thesis examines the underlying relationship between borders and identity in/of postcolonial South Asia, it is crucial to also address the issue of boundaries and borders. The focus on identity invariably leads us to categories like ethnicity, religion, gender, class, and race. In that sense, I suggest that although the inclusion of the boundaries in the study and exploration of borders can be

L.H.M Ling, “World Politics in Colour,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 45, no. 3 (2017): 473–91.

⁸² Ibid. 476

⁸³ Ibid. 474

⁸⁴ Ibid.

considered ‘messy’, it is precisely this messiness that the study of borders needs to embrace and include.⁸⁵ While the notion of boundaries and borders have different disciplinary origins and meanings, I will argue that taken together they facilitate a deeper and fuller study of the idea of borders, exclusions, identity, and belonging. Within border studies, there is an increasing need for a dialogue between socially and culturally constructed differences and its relation to lines demarcated in space.⁸⁶ This conflation of borders and boundaries could lead to renewed debates by delving into questions like, ‘what lines in spaces mean for human beings, and how we attach to and can break away from geometry?’⁸⁷ ‘Taking the complex entanglements of borders and boundaries into account helps to avoid notions of territories as contained and to think against the national order of things.’⁸⁸ Particularly in the case of postcolonial South Asia, where borders, identity, and boundaries are closely tied together, it is necessary to be critical of but also open to the complexities of these close ties. Moreover, responding to the emerging need to study borders beyond the borders of the state, in locations like cities and neighbourhoods, one could pay close attention to the ways in which borders and boundaries reinforce or challenge one another.⁸⁹ For these nuances, as well as to expound the entanglements, contradictions, and notions of rigidity and fluidity, I do not draw a clear delineation between borders and boundaries.

Methodology, Methods and Positionality

The thesis proposes a methodologically driven approach to the study of borders and ideas of borders across multiple locations, scales, and actors. As a result, the role of methodology and methods employed play an imperative role in shaping research questions, processes,

⁸⁵ Anthony Cooper, Chris Perkins, and Chris Rumford, “The Vernacularization of Borders,” in *Placing the Border in Everyday Life*, ed. Reece Jones and Corey Johnson (England & USA: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014).

⁸⁶ Henk van Houtum, “The Geopolitics of Borders and Boundaries,” *Geopolitics* 10, no. 4 (2005): 672–79. 675

⁸⁷ Ibid. 675

⁸⁸ Liisa Malkki, “National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees,” *Cultural Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (1997): 24–44. 26

⁸⁹ van Houtum, “The Geopolitics of Borders and Boundaries.” 674

and outcomes. Methodologically speaking, the thesis employs the border as method approach that is centred on the study of the border from the border.⁹⁰ Within this approach, the border is the research object, a site of enquiry, and a way of knowing. This approach propagates studying the border by being led by the border. It develops through the methodological motivations, emergent questions, and methods employed towards studying, understanding, and analysing the border and ideas of the border across the three locations. The border as method approach evolves with and in relation to findings from the three locations and cases. It shapes and reshapes the nature of the research and the questions posed and surfacing. The empirical findings across the three cases are relational, in other words, findings from the border lead to the case of the city as well as influence that of diaspora and vice versa.

Owing to the multi-sited nature of the thesis, the research process is shaped by what Allaine Cerwonka and Liisa Malkki refer to as ‘improvisation.’⁹¹ Improvisation emphasises the continuous shift between doing and knowing that is inherent to interpretive research. The process of research, particularly fieldwork-based research hinges on improvisation, whereby the process of moving between gathering data, observations, analysis, and writing up are in continuum and dynamic. As a result, this research process developed in stages in conjunction with engaging with the existing literatures and conducting fieldwork. I conducted short, intense, and varying stints of fieldwork at India’s borders with Bangladesh and Pakistan, in the city of Mumbai, and in the diasporic context of London and Birmingham. I conducted preliminary fieldwork at the border between India and Bangladesh in August 2014. Subsequently, in March and December 2016 I conducted fieldwork with the BSF at India’s borders with Bangladesh in Assam and West Bengal, and with Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir respectively. For the case of the city, I conducted fieldwork in Mumbai in March and September in 2015. For the diasporic case, I conducted

⁹⁰ Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, or the Multiplication of Labor* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013).

⁹¹ Liisa H. Malkki, “Tradition and Improvisation in Ethnographic Field Research,” in *Improvising Theory: Process and Temporality in Ethnographic Fieldwork*, ed. Allaine Cerwonka and Liisa H. Malkki (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

fieldwork in May and November 2016. While the development of the thesis was incremental i.e. from the border, to the city, and subsequently to the diasporic context, the research process and fieldwork was not entirely linear or chronological. The organising principle for the selection of these locations is to study borders and ideas of borders across scales i.e. the borders of the nation-state, within the nation-state, and outside the nation-state. The process of writing up findings from the border case took place after the fieldwork in the city was completed. At the same time, the findings and writings evolved across the three cases as more fieldwork was conducted across the three sites. In that sense, the research process is not hermetic or ‘complete’ but more flexible allowing for methodological and epistemological reflection.

During the research period, I travelled back and forth between these three locations while maintaining a critically open stance, ‘following the border’, and reflexively thinking with the border. Each location, i.e. the border, the city, and diaspora, demanded different practical approaches and raised different questions conceptually and empirically. Equally, each of the cases or sites are embedded within diverse academic literatures as well as political and personal contexts that needed to be considered. Owing to the diversity of three locations, each of the empirical chapters of the thesis provide an overview of the historical and political contexts to better situate and understand these cases. As a result, fieldwork in the three locations have varying meaning and serve to address different questions and aspects of the research project. The fieldwork at the border forms a fertile ground from where the thesis develops and grows but also returns to when thinking about borders and ideas of borders. The insights from the border at the border are crucial to understand practices, processes, and ideas of borders in the subsequent locations. The fieldwork in the city of Mumbai, and in the diasporic context of London and Birmingham helps us to study and understand how marginality and migration re/create borders and ideas of borders in across scales and locations. However, since these borders are unlike their traditional forms of barbed wire and fences, fieldwork enabled gaining an insight into the spatial practices associated with these spaces in addition to tapping into the visceral, lived, and experience ‘sense of borders.’ To reiterate Malkki, ‘fieldwork is an embodied, and embodying, form

of knowledge production, why should we leave a considered awareness of the senses out of the project of creating ethnographic understanding?’⁹²

The multi-sited nature of the thesis also resulted in the multiple, overlapping, and contextual positionalities developed within the three contexts. Positionality, as Gurchathen Sanghera and Suruchi Thapar Björkert suggest, ‘frames social and professional relationships in the research field and governs the ‘tone’ of the research.’⁹³ The first site, the border, posed several practical as well as academic issues and questions that led to the engagement with India’s Border Security Force (BSF) to bring in the perspectives of border guards that appeared relatively absent from existent academic perspectives on South Asia’s borderlands and border studies literature more broadly.⁹⁴ Further still, to understand how the border as a concept translates on the ground, it was important to gain access to the border and to understand the complexities of border guards as border inhabitants as well as border enforcers. Simultaneously, it is equally important to underline that conducting research *with* the BSF does not mean conducting research *on* the BSF. Furthermore, the generosity of the BSF in terms of hosting the fieldwork, providing accommodation and travel arrangements to the border areas, and unrestricted access to the borders, it was important to negotiate the fine balance between expressing gratitude while remaining unbiased and critical of the BSF.

Since I gained permission to access the borders areas through official channels, but also from the Director General, the senior most position within the BSF, at the border locations I was often met with some aloofness, suspicion, as well as fear. Older BSF officers were more reticent and distant in their interactions in comparison to younger BSF officers. Interestingly, female BSF officers were extremely hesitant to speak, they were extremely

⁹² Ibid. 177

⁹³ Gurchathen S. Sanghera and Suruchi Thapar-Björkert, “Methodological Dilemmas: Gatekeepers and Positionality in Bradford,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31, no. 3 (2008): 543–62. 553

⁹⁴ For instance see David Gellner, ed., *Borderland Lives in Northern South Asia: Non-State Perspectives* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

Reece Jones, *Border Walls: Security and the War on Terror in the United States, India and Israel* (New York and London: Zed Books, 2012).

conscious of their views and untrusting of my intentions. As a female, my associations with the BSF were also perceived through a gendered lens, as a wife or daughter of someone in the BSF, as well as weak and needing protection. This became evident I was often accompanied by at least two armed officers as we drove to and from border areas and even when we visited the zero-line. It was also often assumed that as a single female researcher, the 'VIP' access to the borders was result of power or privilege of association, neither of which were the case. I was perceived as an Indian female researcher 'from' a University in the UK. Studying abroad had underlining class assumptions at the border as well as in the city. I had formally contacted the office of the Director General for an interview that transformed into being hosted by the BSF. Additionally, officers on the ground remarked on my fitness levels 'as a woman' to keep up with their pace, or at my willingness and 'bravery' to visit 'dangerous' parts of the border. During fieldwork at the borders I was accompanied by my mother, this played an interesting role in the way BSF officers perceived me on the field. Within the Indian context, women are often chaperoned, especially at distant and 'dangerous' places. Here, my mother's presence had a positive effect as it appeared to make officers feel more comfortable, less hostile, and more candid. It also made officers talk about their families and difficulties of managing family life from the distance of the borders. There were also some officers who questioned my authority and repeatedly stated that I could never understand border life without living there. It was, however, clear to me from the beginning that that was not my research aim.

At the second site, my home city of Mumbai, I straddled the dual identity of insider and outsider simultaneously, as someone from Mumbai but not living in Mumbai. In terms of access, I could rely on pre-existing inter-personal relations and contexts. Here, the familiarity and pre-existing notions of neighbourhoods and other underlying assumptions had to be identified, questioned, and deconstructed. The advantage of researching Mumbai is the familiarity and grasp of the context. At the same time, it is necessary to balance the familiar and unknown. In some instances, a degree of anonymity to traverse parts of the city or 'sensitive spaces' is necessary and productive. Here, the line between intimacy/distance and known/unknown plays a very important role in shifting and shaping one's positionality. In Mumbai, I visited and navigated through known and discovered previously unknown spaces within the city. Conversely, in the third location, the diasporic

context is perhaps where I felt most ‘outside’ or ‘alien’ as an Indian female researcher studying in the UK. In this unfamiliar context, I had very few pre-existing inter-personal relations, or contacts that I could utilise. I was also visiting these neighbourhoods in London and Birmingham for the first time and lacked prior knowledge of these spaces. Aspects like my religious and national identity were implicit or obvious through my Hindu name and Indian accent. Throughout the course of this research, I straddled multiple positionalities of an outsider and insider simultaneously that were dependent upon the context and situation, wherein different aspects of my identity were highlighted. Feminist geographer Heidi Nast explains this as betweenness. She claims that ‘we are positioned simultaneously in a number of fields we are always, at some level, somewhere in a state of betweenness, negotiating various degrees and kinds of difference – be they based on gender, age class, ethnicity, “race,” sexuality, and so on.’ In that sense, we can think of ‘betweenness’ as that ‘we are never “outsiders” or “insiders” in any absolute sense.’⁹⁵

Reflections on positionality can be instructive not just in terms of thinking about categories such as race, gender, class, religion, nationality but also in terms of social and spatial contexts that are also shaped by notions of safety, danger, belonging. Since this research project is driven by a focus on identifying, understanding, and analysing borders and border-like sensitive spaces, it is vital to think of positionality more broadly. This is also underlines the ways in which as a female researcher I negotiate access and fieldwork in marginal, ‘dangerous’, and unfamiliar spaces. Walking around, making observations, and conducting interviews in these spaces is determined by issues of access, but more importantly, of safety. Particularly, in the case of the city and diaspora whereby these locations or neighbourhoods within Mumbai, Birmingham and London were considered unsafe, notorious, and dangerous. In some ways, the precarity and vulnerability of being ‘out of place’, or in spaces that were considered unsafe, guided and determined my practical choices in terms of time spent and places visited. While reflections on positionality during research is an on-going endeavour, Peter E. Hopkins also emphasises that ‘we will never

⁹⁵ Heidi Nast, “Women in the Field: Critical Feminist Methodologies and Theoretical Perspectives.,” *Professional Geographer* 46, no. 1 (1994): 54–66. 57

be fully aware of our positionalities, how they have manifested during the research project, how others have interpreted them, and how they have influenced the research participants.’⁹⁶

Structure and Argument

This thesis comprises of five chapters. The first chapter, titled ‘Approaching Borders’, provides a critical and detailed overview of the literature on borders across disciplines. The chapter begins with more general debates on the border as a philosophical category and a political concept. It sheds light on on-going debates about the border as a concept and then outlines three key changes in terms of locations, practices, and actors in border studies. These changes bring to the light newer understanding of borders as mobile, perspectival, and shifting to locations like airports, detention centres, and camps. The shift from the border to bordering practices- i.e. understanding of the border as verb- has brought to the fore various everyday practices, discourses, and processes as well as the inclusion of new actors like citizens and non-citizens. Moving beyond these debates in border studies, the next section focuses on South Asia. It provides a historical overview of the literature and borders in the region. The overview addresses the much-needed engagement with history in critical perspectives on borders in IR. Through its historical context, the chapter outlines the triadic relationship between borders, identity, and territory in postcolonial South Asian politics. Overall, through an engagement with the border as a concept and the literature on South Asia’s borders, the chapter argues for a holistic approach to borders that considers the study of border in totality, through its three dimensions: epistemology; ontology; and phenomenology. Instead of focussing on the inconsistencies between the literatures and contending understandings of the border, it argues for embracing the multiplicity of the borders. Finally, the chapter suggests that rather than choosing a singular notion of border, the thesis works with ambivalent and multiple notions of the border to characterise rather

⁹⁶ Peter E. Hopkins, “Women, Men, Positionalities and Emotion: Doing Feminist Geographies of Religion,” *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 8, no. 1 (2009): 1–17. 6

than define the border. However, it maintains that a critical and reflexive stance is necessary to develop but also thoroughly question the border as a concept.

The second chapter, 'Border as Method: Sensitivity, Imagination, Stranger', formulates the conceptual framework and methodology. I develop 'border as method' as a response to problems and questions that emerge from the literature on South Asia's borders and critical border studies. I take inspiration from Sandro Mezzadra and Breit Neilson's *Border as Method* to further develop and adapt this framework for this thesis. Border as method means studying the border on its own terms and being inductively led by the border, staying clear of attempts to affix conceptual constraints to the border, rather using the border to analyse and explain. In other words, the border becomes a laboratory, and by being in dialogue with the border and its transmuted, visceral, and lived manifestations, we rigorously question the idea of what makes borders work and what sustains the border and ideas of the border across these locations? To develop border as method to serve the questions and purpose of this thesis, I deviate from its original application for borders, migration and labour, to specifically understand the relationship between borders and identity. For this, I provide three interpretative tools to orient and explicate the framework. These tools include: the idea of sensitivity, the work of the imagination, and the figure of the stranger. To develop the idea of sensitivity and 'sense of borders', I borrow from Jason Cons' work on the Indian and Bangladeshi enclaves at the Bengal borderland titled *Sensitive Space*. The work of the imagination takes inspiration from Arjun Appadurai and to some extent draws from Chiara Brambilla's conceptualisation of borderscapes. Finally, for the figure of the stranger, I rely on Sara Ahmed's work *Strange Encounters* and Étienne Balibar's work on the figure of the stranger. By using border as method, I foreground the centrality of methodology in shaping border research and its broader implications. I use border as method as a guiding interpretive framework to search, examine, and remain critically open to ideas of the border.

Once chapter one and two have located the thesis within the literature and laid the conceptual and methodological foundations of the thesis, the subsequent three empirical chapters follow a slightly different logic. Each chapter incrementally builds on the insights of the previous chapter to move to the subsequent location. Every location and each shift

away from the border exposes a different aspect of the border, while still bringing us closer to understanding the border. In that sense, one can think of the three locations or cases as three pieces of a puzzle that one needs to assemble but also stretch and pull apart. Taken together, the three cases explicate the nexus between physical and imagined borders by demonstrating how ideas, practices, and narratives of the border converge and diverge at the border, within the nation, and outside the nation.

Beginning with the border as the first location, the third chapter ‘The border at the border’ focuses on the traditional location of the border. Drawing on fieldwork conducted at the borders between India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, the chapter questions how the concept of the border translates on the ground through everyday practices, narratives, processes of border makers, breakers, and keepers. Using the Border Security Force as an orienting lens, the chapter explicates how the border becomes a border outpost and is institutionally territorialised on a micro level. It examines the centrality of changing geographical terrain, using examples of the riverine border to illustrate the changing nature of the border as well as the practices it necessitates. The chapter then questions the materiality and purpose of the fence to ascertain its deeper meanings. The fence engenders multiple relationalities between border inhabitants and border guards. In some cases, the fence appears to be transgressed and subverted, while in other cases it appears mundane and domesticated. The subversion and transgression of the border does not suggest that borders do not work, instead it merely highlights that subversion and transgression are equally aspects that maintain the border. Finally, the chapter exemplifies how the figure of the illegal Bangladeshi is produced and sustained at the border and in border towns. The location of the border is particularly insightful because although the border appears fragile and in constant search for meaning through practices, the border at the border demonstrates the multiple borders that coexist with it. Principally, the work of the imagination is of fundamental importance in upholding the border in its most concrete, physical, and identifiable incarnation.

Chapter four, titled ‘The City’, emerged from recognising the connections between the border and city. In this chapter, I trace the ways in which ideas, narratives, and practices associated with the border are reproduced in the city. Since Mumbai is not a traditional case

of a ‘divided city’, where an international border runs through the city, this chapter plays closer attention to the subtle, internalised, and mundane ways in which ideas associated with the border are reproduced in the city. Drawing from interviews and fieldwork in the city, the chapter problematises Mumbai’s cosmopolitanism image to delve into how border dynamics and exclusions are produced in some of the city’s Muslim ghettos colloquially referred to as *chhota* or mini-Pakistan. The chapter asks how the Bombay Riots spatially and culturally transformed the spatial politics of the city and examines the ongoing legacy of this violent and divisive event. Through exploring the everyday narratives, stereotypes, and stigma associated with the Muslim, the chapter traces how the figure of the Muslim stranger is upheld but also challenged. Drawing more explicit connections between the border and the city, the chapter also traces how the figure of the Bangladeshi stranger appears in the city, becomes identifiable, yet remains largely unseen in the slum. Overall, the chapter illustrates that while there is no clear-cut border in the city, there are divisions. Like the border at the border, these divisions appear as rigid, fungible, contextual, and subverted. This chapter plays a central role in not only connecting the border to the city, but illustrating the practices that allow this connection.

While the previous two chapters and locations, ‘The Border’ and ‘The City’, represent the inside/outside dynamic of the border in South Asia, it is important to disrupt this dualism by including the case of diaspora in this thesis. The South Asian diaspora flips this seemingly neat equation between the border and the city on its head. To recall Menon, ‘the diasporic location too, is one that offers rich insights from ‘over’ the nation.’⁹⁷ Furthermore, if the two previous cases reveal the nexus between the physical and ideational border and the fungibility of the border, then to what extent is the border mobile and rigid? Chapter five, titled ‘Diaspora’, traces the journeys of South Asians to Britain in colonial and postcolonial contexts. It seeks to question the dialectical dynamic of the border between hybridity and essentialisation. That said, this chapter does not choose one city in postcolonial Britain but rather stays true to the notion of dispersion and diaspora, analysing the South Asian diaspora through spaces of their dispersal and identifiability in

⁹⁷ Menon, “Thinking through the Postnation.” 76

Birmingham and London. Principally, the chapter examines India's complex postcolonial borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh through forms of everyday bordering in diasporic space. It underlines the connections between ideas of belonging, territory, the nation, and localities through empirical insights from South Asia localities in Little Pakistan in Birmingham and Banglatown in London. Fundamentally, the chapter illustrates that ideas of belonging and identity among the South Asian diaspora in Britain appear in territorial terms that themselves follow or create a sense of borders. In a sense that the relationship between identity and belonging is reflective of rigid and fluid borders that are bounded but also loose.

The first substantive chapter's key argument is that even when the border is at its most concrete and material manifestation, it is governed by the work of the imagination and the figure of the Bangladeshi stranger. The site of the physical border is important because it demonstrates the persistence of the ideational border at the physical border. This nexus between the physical and ideational border becomes the hook or the lever on which the border shifts. The border moves through the imagined border. The imagined border, or the work of the imagined border, can be understood as what transforms any fence into a border, and a border into just a fence. This stickiness of the border and ideas associated with the territorial and linear border allows the border in the city to be identified, traced, and studied. This becomes the second piece of this thesis's puzzle. The border in the city is upheld through narratives, spatial practices of exclusion, and stereotypes, but this border is also negotiated, transgressed and subverted. The idea of the border travels to the city through the spectral figure of the Bangladeshi stranger and the domestication of the border in neighbourhoods and local space. Although this chapter shows that the border and ideas of the border travel, they only demonstrate that borders do so within the nation. The case of the diaspora is important then, because it disrupts the relationship between inside/outside. The diasporic case explores how ideas of the postcolonial border journey to the (post)colonial metropole. In some ways, this marks a full circle in the border journey i.e. moving from South Asia to the transnational context but inversely moving from the colonial metropole to the postcolonial nation state. As such, this case problematises the idea of the 'origin' of the border. Building on insights from the border and the city, the

diaspora case shows that the border exists away from the barbed wire fences, and sheds light on the complex, intricate, and layered exclusions of borders away from the border.

In conclusion, this thesis puts forth a multi-layered argument. Firstly, it argues in favour of rethinking the approach to studying the border rather than the border itself. In other words, the thesis argues that the pertinent question for border studies is not what a border is but how should we approach the study of borders. To substantiate this argument the thesis presents the border *as* method approach. Through this approach that entails studying the border as a way of knowing, the thesis also argues that the ideational border plays a key role in reproducing the border. The thesis finds that borders in postcolonial South Asia are durable, resilient, and elastic.

Chapter One: Approaching Borders

The three dimensions of Borders

Before providing a critical review of the existing debates on the border in the literature, this chapter begins by outlining a key gap that frames the approach to studying borders. To explicate this schism, I draw on an illustration. The historic Land Boundary Agreement⁹⁸ between India and Bangladesh had been passed in May 2015. The two countries had finally settled their disputed border and granted citizenship, statehood, and access to basic services to thousands of previously stateless enclave dwellers whose daily lives were marred by this dispute.⁹⁹ This passing of the LBA in effect changed and redrew the border. To understand the deeper implications of this change, I interviewed the Director General (DG) of India's Border Security Force (BSF) at the headquarters in New Delhi.¹⁰⁰ The DG posed questions about my fieldwork, keen to know what I had 'found' so far. I had prepared questions that drew from an emerging sense of the field, ideas from the literature, and political events in the news. For instance, seeking insight into the BSF's bordering practices away from the border and drawing on the notion of 'vacillated borders', I asked the DG whether the BSF participated in operations that identified and sent alleged Bangladeshis from slums in Indian cities back to Bangladesh through the border.¹⁰¹ However, in a moment of imperfect translation between ideas of the border in the literature and the border on the ground, I

⁹⁸ The Land Boundary Agreement came into force in May 2015, led to redrawing parts of the border and exchange of the 111 Indian and 51 Bangladeshi enclaves dispersed between the two countries. These enclaves are remnants of Partition that were left unresolved. However, after the creation of Bangladesh there was an agreement signed between Indira Gandhi and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1974 which was ratified by Bangladesh the Indian government never ratified it. In 2011, Indian Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh and Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina signed another protocol trying to formalise 1974 agreement this but unfortunately that agreement couldn't be clinched owing to opposition from Indian political parties like the nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

⁹⁹ Furquan Ameen Siddiqui, "India Bangladesh Land Boundary Deal: Tale of Loss and Struggle Peppered with Hope," *Hindustan Times*, June 14, 2015. (Accessed June 15, 2016).

¹⁰⁰ The Director General of the Border Security Force changed from Mr DK Pathak to Mr KK Mishra in February 2016.

¹⁰¹ Étienne Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene* (London and New York: Verso, 2002).

See Sujata Ramachandran, "'Operation Pushback': Sangh Parivar, State, Slums And Surreptitious Bangladeshis In New Delhi," *Economic and Political Weekly* 38, no. 7 (2003): 637–47.

accidentally let slip the term ‘shifting borders.’ Before I could explain, the DG interrupted me, ‘The border is shifting, what do you mean?’¹⁰² Assuming this was an aberration, and seeking no clarification, the DG authoritatively remarked, ‘demographic changes are taking place, the border is not shifting, the border is there, border *is* there, *is there*.’¹⁰³ By the third repetition, I did not press on. From the DG’s perspective, it was clear. The changing demography of the Indo-Bangladeshi border districts in Assam from Hindu majority to Muslim majority, is *not* akin to the shifting of the border.¹⁰⁴ The BSF is only deployed to ‘man the border’ at the border, inextricably tying the location of the border to the presence of the BSF.¹⁰⁵

Nevertheless, there are many ways of interpreting this exchange. One could begin with the view that this is an obvious example which does not reveal anything new. For the Director General of India’s Border Security Force, the border is purely territorial, and therefore would *only* be located at the border. Alternatively, one could attribute this misunderstanding to the tussle between traditional ideas about borders that focus on ‘states, their territories and notions of borders as physical outcomes of political, social and/or economic processes’ and contemporary border research that contests the naturalness of borders, and the ‘container box’ ideas of states and their borders.¹⁰⁶ However, classifying the DG’s position as predictable, or analysing this as a classic tension between the conceptualisations of borders as fluid/rigid or mobile/fixed employs binaries that this thesis aims to avoid. The developing dialectic between contemporary border studies, which understands borders as mobile, and the understandings of those ‘on the ground’ who understand them as immovable and fixed, is worth problematising because it attenuates the

¹⁰² Interview with author, September 10, 2015, New Delhi.

¹⁰³ Interview with author, September 10, 2015, New Delhi.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with author, September 10, 2015, New Delhi.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with author, September 10, 2015, New Delhi.

¹⁰⁶ James Scott and Vladimir Kolossov, “Selected Conceptual Issues in Border Studies,” *Belgeo: Belgian Journal of Geography* 1 (2013): 2–16.

productive tensions between the multiple locations of the border as an academic concept but also a political reality.

The idea of a dialectical process enables the fusion of multiple and competing dimensions of the border. Harald Bauder suggests that ‘the recognition of multiple border aspects constitutes a moment in the border dialectic that does not permit the border concept to be fixed, stable, or universal.’¹⁰⁷ In this vein, rather than reconciling between dichotomies of fixed/mobile, traditional/contemporary, or field/literature, it is necessary to simultaneously consider *and* thoroughly question these contending assumptions. Put differently, what if one used the tensions between theory and practice, or the literature and the field, in conjunction and not opposition to place the multiplicity of the border at the forefront rather than to draw facile distinctions between seemingly separate categories? This move could reveal the broad and local framings, connections and disconnections, as well as consistencies and inconsistencies, inscribed in these conceptualisations. In other words, what if one considered the possibility that borders appear both fixed *and* mobile?

Further, this illustration seeks to underline that competing ideas of the border exist not just within one literature, but also across ‘fields.’ Put differently, ‘borders are both a philosophical category as well as fundamental social phenomena.’¹⁰⁸ It illuminates that ‘approaching borders’ requires a negotiation between the three dimensions of borders that can be understood as the border as a widely studied academic concept, an everyday political reality, and a site of investigation. That said, a key challenge that underpins the literature is the arguably incomplete approach towards studying borders holistically. In other words, most studies, as this chapter will subsequently demonstrate, tend to overemphasise either the conceptualisations or empirical realities. Through this example, this thesis seeks to point to the larger issue of approaching borders holistically, through a balanced engagement with the three dimensions. Rather than concluding with this approach, I propose that we

¹⁰⁷ Harald Bauder, “Toward a Critical Geography of the Border: Engaging the Dialectic of Practice and Meaning,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 101, no. 5 (2011): 1126–39.

¹⁰⁸ Scott and Kolossov, “Selected Conceptual Issues in Border Studies.” 2

begin by approaching borders holistically to augment our study of borders. The three constitutive dimensions of the border can be understood as i) the study of the border as an academic concept ii) the existence of the border as a political reality and iii) the border as a site for research.

Principally, the border is a central concept in International Relations that ‘frames’, structures, and permits the ‘inter-national.’¹⁰⁹ Despite its importance to IR, it is vital to note that the border is a dynamic concept that cuts across disciplinary boundaries and encapsulates a vast range of issues. However, irrespective of the conceptual complexity of the border in academia, the border is not abstract. This is reflected by its second dimension: the identifiable, material, and geopolitical manifestation at the limits of the nation state. As a political reality, the border features in news, political and everyday discourse, and is also shaped by political events. Finally, there is a third dimension of the border as a site of investigation and an everyday phenomenon. Here, I propose the location or idea of the field, as a site that renders the border open to ‘empirical testing’, questioning, and critique.¹¹⁰ In this way, by treating these three dimensions as co-constitutive and in unison, we also engage with the epistemic, ontological, and phenomenological aspects of the border. These three dimensions are not distinct but intertwined.¹¹¹ By interpreting the border through its three dimensions, we can steer clear of producing or reinforcing binaries or disciplinary borders when approaching the border. Importantly, the three dimensions address the border

¹⁰⁹ Nick Vaughan-Williams, *Border Politics: The Limits of Sovereign Power* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009). 44

¹¹⁰ Giovanni Sartori, “Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics,” *The American Political Science Review* 64, no. 4 (1970): 1033–53. 1035

¹¹¹ Comparably, Chiara Brambilla also sees borders as epistemic and political categories that are mutually reinforcing and categorises them along three main axes of reflection that are overlapping, interrelated and can be analytically distinguished as: epistemological, ontological, and methodological. See Chiara Brambilla, “Exploring the Critical Potential of the Borderscapes Concept,” *Geopolitics* 20, no. 1 (2015): 14–34.

and its complexities in totality. It also orients how this project articulates, analyses, and engages with the study of borders.

Following this approach, the ‘problem’ that this chapter addresses is not one that solely emerges from the literature, but is situated at the intersections of and overlaps between these spaces. While this chapter will primarily focus on one dimension, the literature, it will also draw from the other two dimensions, border politics and the field, to enhance our understanding of the issues at hand. This chapter begins with a broad overview of the literature on borders, focusing on the ways in which the concept of the border has changed. It then focuses on three changes, namely: location; practices; and actors, in order to comprehend, question, and critique the extent of these changes. The second section focuses on the borders of postcolonial South Asia, offering a historical overview of borders to address the persistence and paradox of border lines. This section also seeks to overcome the absence of historical engagement in border studies. Building on this, the third section of the chapter draws on the literature to explicate the triadic relationship among borders, identity, and territory. The fourth and final section critically evaluates the literature on borders beyond disciplinary boundaries, or formulations of non-western and Eurocentric borders, drawing out the main questions that emerge from this overview, allowing me finally to locate this thesis. Overall, this chapter argues that to study borders we should conceptualise borders in their totality, through an awareness of their three dimensions without seeking a singularity of the border. Rather than pointing at gaps or problems in the literature and forcing a choice between competing notions of the border, this chapter argues that we should take a contrary approach. It seeks to embrace the ambivalence of borders and foregrounds the ways that inconsistent and multiple notions of borders do not obscure what a border is, but rather that embracing these inconsistencies allows us to reflexively question, engage, and critically assess the changing meanings of borders.

Contested, Ubiquitous, Evolving: The Border as a Concept

The border is a fluid and transversal concept that has undergone significant change through sustained academic engagement, interrogation, and development across disciplines like international relations, political geography, critical geopolitics, sociology, and

anthropology.¹¹² In some ways, an overview of the literature on borders must reflect the conceptual evolution of the border. Even though this thesis is more concerned with how the border works rather than what the border is, in order to answer the *how* question, it is vital to address the *what* question as well. In other words, we will not be able to study how the border works until we have a sense of what it is. However, the problem of defining a border runs deep, owing to its conceptual ambiguities and changing meanings. For example, as Henk van Houtum suggests, ‘a barbed wire, a wall, a gate, a door, a barrier, a line on the map, a river, a line in the sand, it can all be borders.’¹¹³ Responding to this diversity of borders, Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly concludes that ‘each border is unique and no taxonomy of border is conceptually feasible because there are too many types of borders.’¹¹⁴ Kolossov and Scott conclude their investigation of borders with the realisation that ‘there can be no hegemonic dominance of any specific social theory, whether critical or not, in the understanding of space or its social significance.’¹¹⁵ These works demonstrate a reticence in the literature to define what a border is, rendering even the concept porous, and open to interpretation.

The difficulty of defining a border is mirrored by the absence of any singular or general border theory.¹¹⁶ In border studies, the dilemma between focusing on situated knowledge of borders and developing a general border theory remains unresolved. James Sidaway

¹¹² See Joan Schimanski and Stephen F. Wolfe, eds., *Border Aesthetics: Concepts and Intersections* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Publishers, 2017).

Michel Agier, *Borderlands: Towards an Anthropology of the Cosmopolitan Condition* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016).

Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary and Frédéric Giraut, eds., *Borderities and the Politics of Contemporary Mobile Borders* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

James D. Sidaway, “Mapping Border Studies,” *Geopolitics* 20, no. 1 (2015): 214–22.

¹¹³ Henk van Houtum, “The Mask of the Border,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Border Studies*, ed. Doris Wastl-Walter (England & USA: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011), 49–62.

¹¹⁴ Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, “Theorizing Borders: An Interdisciplinary Perspective,” *Geopolitics* 10, no. 4 (2005): 633–49.

¹¹⁵ Scott and Kolossov, “Selected Conceptual Issues in Border Studies.” 2

¹¹⁶ See Thomas Nail, *Theory of the Border* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Special Issue by Chris Rumford, “Theorising Borders,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 9, no. 2 (2006): 155–169.

deems the idea of a general border theory as a ‘chimera.’¹¹⁷ Anssi Paasi too, claims that a general border theory is not only unattainable but also undesirable, as the complexity and multifarious nature of borders do not lend themselves to a grand theory that is valid for all borders.¹¹⁸ Étienne Balibar is also circumspect about the dangers of answering ‘What is a border?’, for epistemological reasons. The idea of a simple definition of a border is absurd for Balibar, because ‘to mark out a border is, precisely, to define a territory, to delimit it, and so to register the identity of that territory, or confer one upon it... to define or identify in general is nothing other than to trace a border, to assign boundaries or borders.’¹¹⁹ Balibar believes that ‘the theorist who attempts to define what a border is is in danger of going round in circles, as the very representation of the border is the preconditions for any definition.’¹²⁰ This epistemic characteristic of the border is necessary to acknowledge that borders *are* defining, they perpetuate ideas and perceptions of knowability and otherness. Moreover, Balibar’s caution also necessitates a degree of openness that is required to grasp the layers, contradictions, and complexity involved in the study of the border. While it remains essential not to limit the border, we also cannot entirely avoid trying to *characterise*, if not define, the border.

Balibar outlines three characteristics of borders, which he claims are overdetermined, polysemic, and heterogeneous. In Balibar’s view, borders are not just boundaries between two states but are always *overdetermined* i.e. ‘sanctioned, reduplicated and relativized by other geopolitical divisions.’¹²¹ This ‘intrinsic’ feature that is central to the world-configuring function of borders is dependent on *over*-determination or constant and excessive reproduction, without which Balibar claims ‘there would be no borders – or no lasting borders.’¹²² While Balibar explains the polysemic nature of borders, and the

¹¹⁷ James D. Sidaway, “The Return and Eclipse of Border Studies? Charting Agendas,” *Geopolitics* 16, no. 4 (2011): 969–76.

¹¹⁸ Anssi Paasi, “A Border Theory: An Unattainable Dream or a Realistic Aim for Border Scholars?,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Border Studies*, ed. Doris Wastl-Walter (New York and Oxon: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011), 11–32.

¹¹⁹ Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*.

¹²⁰ Ibid. 76

¹²¹ Ibid. 79

¹²² Ibid.

relationship between borders and difference through social class, one could also extend this to other forms of categorisation like race, gender, religion, ethnicity, and nationality that would alter how different individuals experience the border differently. Through polysemy Balibar points to the phenomenology of what the border *means*. Finally, by ubiquity of borders Balibar suggests that *some borders are no longer situated at the borders at all*, in the geographic-politico-administrative sense of the term.¹²³ In this way, Balibar sketches a blueprint that many scholars continue to follow in contemporary border studies.

‘Border’ has been one of the most significant keywords in the history of political geography, indeed a mirror image of the idea of the territorial state.¹²⁴ Likewise, in International Relations (IR), the border is a key tenet, a definitive concept tied intimately to the idea of the nation-state that reaffirms notions of territory and sovereignty, as well as produces binaries like inside/outside, anarchy/progress, global/local, and us/them. Nick Vaughan-Williams notes that ‘this concept not only provides an important ontological, but also epistemological framework within which some of the most familiar understandings of core terms, such as territory, sovereignty, power and authority, make sense.’¹²⁵ The international system relies on borders to fix and perpetuate the notion that states and territories are stable and fixed, a notion that John Agnew calls the ‘territorial trap’ in IR.¹²⁶ Concurrently, the logic of inside/outside as a sort of ‘iron cage’ within which the modern geopolitical imagination and the discipline of IR is trapped has also been challenged by scholars like Rob Walker.¹²⁷ These debates influence ideas of borders, their functions,

¹²³ Ibid. 84

¹²⁴ Anssi Paasi, “The Shifting Landscapes of Border Studies and the Challenge of Relational Thinking,” in *The New European Frontiers: Social and Spatial (Re)Integration Issues in Multicultural and Border Regions*, ed. Milan Bufon, Julian Minghi, and Anssi Paasi (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014). 9

¹²⁵ Vaughan-Williams, *Border Politics: The Limits of Sovereign Power*.

¹²⁶ Agnew, John. “The Territorial Trap: The Geographical Assumptions of International Relations Theory.”

¹²⁷ Reiko Shindo and Aoileann Ni Mhurchu, eds., *Critical Imaginations in International Relations* (Oxon: Routledge, 2016). 16

See R.B.J Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as International Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

locations, and purpose in contemporary politics. Critiquing this, Vaughan-Williams argues that the border is not only taken for granted but is also treated as a ‘static, ahistorical, territorial given: a mythical line in the sand assumed to be located at the outer-edge of the modern sovereign state.’¹²⁸ Critical border studies, a nascent subfield of borders studies responds to this impasse by analysing the ‘seismic changes in the nature and location of the border and their ethical-political implications’ and by interrogating the relationship between borders and territory.¹²⁹ Noel Parker and Vaughan-Williams in their initial intervention ‘Lines in the Sand? Towards an Agenda for Critical Border Studies’ contest what Yosef Lapid calls the ‘territorialist epistemology’ to formulate alternative epistemologies, ontologies, and methodologies that capture the changing nature of the border and examine borders beyond their traditional territorial location.¹³⁰ Crucially, they advocate a shift from treating ‘the concept of the border as a territorially fixed, static, line, to thinking of it in terms of a series of *practices* that entails a more political sociological, and actor-oriented outlook on how divisions between entities *appear*, or are *produced* and *sustained*.’¹³¹ Critical border studies offers ‘a heterogeneous assemblage of thought that challenges the linear imaginations of the border to seek theorisations for alternative border imaginaries.’¹³² In this endeavour, Parker and Vaughan-Williams initiate a ‘concerted effort to decentre the border,’ to problematise the border not as a taken-for-granted entity, but as a site of investigation.¹³³ For critical border studies scholars, the border is not a given nor ‘never simply present nor fully established’, but is ‘in a constant state of becoming.’¹³⁴ Diversifying border studies with critical perspectives, Grundy-Warr and Kumar Rajaram introduce the idea of ‘borderscapes’ as an entry point, allowing for the study of ‘the border as mobile, perspectival, and relational... they study practices, performances, and discourses

¹²⁸ Nick Vaughan-Williams, “Borders,” in *Critical Imaginations in International Relations*, ed. Reiko Shindo and Aoileann Ni Mhurchu (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2016). 11

¹²⁹ Parker and Vaughan-Williams, “Lines in the Sand? Towards an Agenda for Critical Border Studies.”

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.* 586

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ Noel Parker and Nick Vaughan-Williams, eds., *Critical Border Studies: Broadening and Deepening the “Lines in the Sand” Agenda* (New York and Oxon: Routledge, 2014). 3

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

that seek to capture, contain, and instrumentally use the border to affix a dominant spatiality, temporality, and political agency.’¹³⁵ Instead of merely fixed lines, Paasi claims that borders are now also seen as social processes, practices, discourses, knowledge, narratives, symbols and institutions.¹³⁶

In their comprehensive six-hundred-page edited volume, *A Companion to Border Studies*, Wilson and Donnan¹³⁷ evaluate how the first generation of border studies has progressed. From focusing on the relationship between nation and state, and thinking of borders as geographical and political peripheries, or even using the Mexico-US border as main focus or point of reference, border studies has undergone a fundamental ‘shift in epistemology’ and adopted ethnographic methods.¹³⁸ This epistemological shift has rendered borders “process” as much as “product”, and Wilson and Donnan note that states are increasingly ‘regarded as incomplete, fragmented and embedded through everyday practice.’¹³⁹ Like critical border studies, they focus on bordering that occurs within, as well as at the edges of the nation-state, emphasising “margins” as the new “centers.”¹⁴⁰ Analogously, in their intervention ‘Geographies at the margins: borders in South Asia – an introduction’, Romola Sanyal and Jason Cons unsettle the notion that borders exist only on the physical margins of the state, and instead suggest that these spaces are “displaced” to the “centers” in different ways, problematising the location of borders through the lens of marginality.¹⁴¹ Sanyal and Cons seek to redefine an analytic space in which margins and centers are

¹³⁵ Carl Grundy-Warr and Prem Kumar Rajaram, eds., *Borderscapes: Hidden Geographies and Politics at Territory's Edge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2007).

Also see Vicki Squire, ed., *The Contested Politics of Mobility: Borderzones and Irregularity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

See Gabriel Popescu, *Bordering and Ordering the Twenty First Century: Understanding Borders* (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2012).

¹³⁶ Paasi, “The Shifting Landscapes of Border Studies and the Challenge of Relational Thinking.” 9

¹³⁷ See Donnan and Wilson, *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State*,.

¹³⁸ Hastings Donnan and Thomas M. Wilson, eds., *A Companion to Border Studies* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012). 13

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Sanyal and Cons, “Geographies at the Margins: Borders in South Asia - an Introduction.” 6

conceived as intimately linked and mutually constituting.¹⁴² Doris Wastl-Walter's seven-hundred-page edited volume, *Research Companion to Border Studies*, shares an aim, that of reflecting on the changing and ubiquitous nature of borders. She suggests that borders 'can be material or non-material and may appear in the form of a barbed-wire fence, a brick wall, a door, a heavily-armed border guard or as symbolic boundaries, that is, conceptual distinctions created by actors to categorize components of belonging and exclusion.'¹⁴³ This common thread running through contemporary border studies literature establishes a degree of coherence and consistency in the changing epistemological and analytical frames through which we view the border.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to articulate that while the relationship between border studies and politics, or its two dimensions, is robust, it is still shaped by the asymmetries of the international system within which border studies is embedded. For instance, the effect of the post-Cold War era and the fall of the Berlin Wall, as well as the 'borderless world' globalisation era¹⁴⁴, followed by the post 9/11 era¹⁴⁵ and the resurgence of border security and surveillance, the refugee crisis¹⁴⁶, narratives of 'Fortress Europe'¹⁴⁷ are evident across the literature. However, these trends predominantly reflect politics in the West. For example, at the time the historic Land Boundary Agreement between India and Bangladesh was passed in 2015, the Indian prime minister Narendra Modi remarked that this agreement was comparable to the fall of the Berlin Wall, but because India and Bangladesh are poor

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Doris Wastl-Walter, ed., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Border Studies* (England & USA: Ashgate, 2011). 2

¹⁴⁴ See David Newman, "The Lines That Continue to Separate Us: Borders in Our 'Borderless' World," *Progress in Human Geography* 30, no. 2 (2006): 143–61.

See Vladimir Kolossov, "Border Studies: Changing Perspectives and Theoretical Approaches," *Geopolitics* 10, no. 4 (2005): 606–32.

See Mathias Albert, David Jacobson, and Yosef Lapid, eds., *Identities, Borders, Orders: Rethinking International Relations Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

¹⁴⁵ See Elia Zureik and Mark B. Salter, *Global Surveillance and Policing* (USA and Canada: Wilan Publishing, 2005).

¹⁴⁶ See Reece. Jones, *Violent Borders: Refugees and the Right to Move* (London and New York: Verso, 2016).

¹⁴⁷ See Nick Vaughan-Williams, *Europe's Border Crisis: Biopolitical Security and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

nations of the developing world, this historic incident went by unnoticed.¹⁴⁸ Despite the fact that the enclaves between India and Bangladesh have gained symbolic value disproportionate to their size, Modi's comparison cannot be ignored either.¹⁴⁹ The problem with the dominance of the EU and US-Mexico on border studies is not an absence of non-western borders but the absence of non-Western perspectives on the conceptual contours of the border. To illustrate this, Sanyal and Cons challenge the modularity of borders proposed by Wendy Brown, and argue that 'all experiences of walling are not only similar, but grounded and based-upon Western experience.'¹⁵⁰ This tendency 'effaces the possibility that spaces such as South Asia are key sites in the shaping of broader patterns of bordering and walling, as opposed to simply locations to which these practices are exported.'¹⁵¹ Equally, Donnan and Wilson acknowledge this dominance of Eurocentric conceptual approaches and seek to 'chip away' at this Western orientation in their comprehensive edited volume.¹⁵² It is important to bear in mind these asymmetries implicit in border studies.

Practices, Location, and Actors

Addressing questions of 'how, where and who' in border changes, I will focus on three broad changes of the border. First, I will examine the analytical shift from the border to bordering, i.e. the focus away from the border as a line to the focus on bordering practices.¹⁵³ 'Bordering practices keep things apart or bring them together; borders are

¹⁴⁸ "Text of PM's Address at Bangabandhu Convention Centre," *PM India*, 2015, http://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/text-of-pms-address-at-bangabandhu-convention-centre/?comment=disable. (Accessed June 23, 2017).

¹⁴⁹ Cons, *Sensitive Space: Fragmented Territory at the India-Bangladesh Border*.

¹⁵⁰ Sanyal and Cons, "Geographies at the Margins: Borders in South Asia - an Introduction." 7

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Donnan and Wilson, *A Companion to Border Studies*. 13

¹⁵³ It is important to note that this shift to bordering is not heralded by critical border studies scholars alone. Prior to them critical geographers, Henk van Houtum and Ton van Nearssen in their article 'Bordering, Ordering and Othering' published in 2002, contend that 'the word 'borders' unjustly assumes that places are fixed in space and time, and should rather be understood in terms of bordering, as an ongoing strategic effort to make a difference in space among the movements of people, money and products.' Similarly, geographer Anssi Paasi broadened the comprehension of boundaries from stable, fixed lines and as products of a modernist project to conceptualisations of

articulated in particular terms, and they allow certain expressions of identity and collective memory to exist while blocking others.¹⁵⁴ Moreover, Paasi contends that bordering always mirrors power relations, choices, and negotiation; such practices are open to contestation at the level of state but can also be contested in everyday life.¹⁵⁵ This, Paasi claims raises questions as to how borders should actually be drawn, where they are and how do they function.¹⁵⁶ Likewise, playing on the incongruities between the ‘borderless world’ narrative and the ‘war on terror’, Johnson *et al* analyse the effect of these events on borders in their material, virtual, technological manifestations to grasp the shifts in the spatiality of borders.¹⁵⁷ Like Parker and Vaughan-Williams, Johnson *et al* pose the question of location and method, asking ‘where do we look for evidence of bordering practices and what are the impacts on particular places?’¹⁵⁸ These questions underline the broader changes in spatiality, surveillance, locations, and security practices that influence border politics. Parker and Adler-Nissen explain *bordering practices* as ‘activities which have the effect... of constituting, sustaining, or modifying borders, such practices can be both intentional, unintentional; carried out by the state or non-state actors including citizens, private security companies.’¹⁵⁹ Second, I will examine the way that the move from the borderline to bordering has also shifted the location of borders as well as who can border.¹⁶⁰ The key

processes that exist in socio-cultural action and discourse and broaden our understandings of the function and meanings of borders. While critical border studies deserve credit in efforts to streamline existent perspectives, it would be disingenuous to claim this shift as entirely ‘new.’ For this critical review, I focus on critical border studies.

See Henk van Houtum and Ton van Naerssen, “Bordering, Ordering, Othering,” *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie* 93, no. 2 (2002): 125–36.

Anssi Paasi, “Boundaries as Social Processes: Territoriality in the World of Flows,” *Geopolitics* 3, no. 1 (2007): 69–88.

¹⁵⁴ Paasi, “The Shifting Landscapes of Border Studies and the Challenge of Relational Thinking.” 9

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ See Stéphane Rosière and Reece Jones, “Teichopolitics: Re-Considering Globalisation Through the Role of Walls and Fences,” *Geopolitics* 17, no. 1 (2012): 217–34.

¹⁵⁸ Corey Johnson et al., “Interventions on Rethinking ‘the Border’ in Border Studies,” *Political Geography* 30 (2011): 61–69.

¹⁵⁹ Salter, “Theory of the /: The Suture and Critical Border Studies.” 3

¹⁶⁰ See Mountz, A. ‘Border politics: spatial provision and geographical precision’ in ‘Interventions on Rethinking ‘the border’ in Border Studies, *Political Geography* 30 (2011): 61-69. Mountz, in the same series, draws on the US-Mexico border case to elucidate two directions of the shifting

idea underpinning this change is Balibar's notion that 'borders are vacillating', a notion that suggests 'borders are being both multiplied and reduced in their localization and their function; they are being thinned out and doubled... borders have stopped marking the limits where politics ends because the community ends... borders are no longer the shores of the political, but have indeed become – the space of the political itself.'¹⁶¹ Accepting Balibar's idea that 'borders are everywhere' and that the loci of bordering practices can no longer be identified with the geographical boundaries of sovereign states, Johnson and Reece Jones ask 'where is the border in border studies?''¹⁶² Like Johnson and Jones, it remains pertinent to critically examine these ideas while remaining sceptical to easily accepting them.

In his influential text, *Border Politics: Limits of Sovereign Power*, Nick Vaughan-Williams develops the idea of vacillating borders by examining a theoretical lacuna in the study of borders and responding to it with the notion of a generalised biopolitical border. Vaughan-Williams articulates a shift from the study of borders as primarily geopolitical institutions to understanding bordering practices as biopolitical phenomena. He notes, 'in other words, rather than fixed, static lines on maps, borders are increasingly theorized as portable machines of sovereign power that are inseparable from the bodies they performatively produce and sort into different categories.'¹⁶³ Alongside that of Mark Salter,¹⁶⁴ Vaughan-Williams' work focuses on the fulcrum of sovereignty and Agamben's 'bare life', developing the 'fixed' border into a generalised biopolitical border.¹⁶⁵ Contesting the

border: offshore or inward inside sovereign territory. Drawn by the question of new cartographies of border enforcement Mountz focuses on spaces like offshore island detention centres, intimate spaces and bus stations employing innovative methodologies to ascertain mobile borders of the mobile nation state. In her articulation, the border enforcement and racialized discourses of exclusion are interlinked.

See Mountz, A. 'In/visibility and the securitization of migration: shaping publics through border enforcement on islands', *Cultural Politics* 11(2) (2015): 184-200.

¹⁶¹ Étienne Balibar, "The Borders of Europe," in *Politics and the Other Scene* (London and New York: Verso, 2002). 92

¹⁶² Johnson et al., "Interventions on Rethinking 'the Border' in Border Studies." 61

¹⁶³ Vaughan-Williams, *Border Politics: The Limits of Sovereign Power*. 39

¹⁶⁴ See Salter, M. 'Passports, Mobility, and Security: How smart can the border be?' *International Studies Perspective*, 5: 1 (2004): 71-91. Salter, M. B. 'When the exception becomes the rule: borders, sovereignty, and citizenship', *Citizenship Studies*, 12:4 (2008), 365-380.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. 39

binary of the outside/inside framework, Vaughan-Williams presents the generalised biopolitical border as the limit of sovereign power, as a decision on the status of life that can effectively happen anywhere; a multifaceted and decentred biopolitical apparatus that is as mobile as the subjects it seeks to control.¹⁶⁶ However, in Vaughan-Williams' understanding, the border is interchangeable with the sovereign decision to produce some life as bare life, and this decision, considered a dividing practice, is one that can effectively happen anywhere, that constitutes the 'original spatialisation of sovereign power.'¹⁶⁷ Such a decision, Vaughan-Williams claims, 'is very much a practice of security because the production of bare life shores up notions of who and what 'we' are.'¹⁶⁸ Vaughan-Williams' key proposition, that the border is no longer what and where it used to be, is innovative and has helped to open new avenues for alternative border imaginaries. However, what is problematic is that Vaughan-Williams' definition of the border and how the border shifts focuses on security practices that defines the border in a binary confinement of a sovereign decision. As a result, even though Vaughan-Williams urges us to seek alternative imaginaries and to open ourselves to the possibilities of what and where borders are, we end up viewing this possibility in a constricted conceptual abstraction that confines the expansion of the border to a sovereign decision. In Vaughan-Williams' alternative imaginary, the border is too abstract and is an outcome of the very particular security practices of the sovereign that has limited traction. Most notably, Vaughan-Williams' production of bare life does not consider the question of race and other identities and their role in re/producing the generalised biopolitical border.

Louise Amoore's work on the biometric border demonstrates a different take on bordering practices, location, and actors.¹⁶⁹ She states that 'the sovereign decision of the border' is

¹⁶⁶ Nick Vaughan-Williams, "The Generalised Bio-Political Border? Re-Conceptualising the Limits of Sovereign Power," *Review of International Studies* 35 (2009): 729–49. 748.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. 746

¹⁶⁹ See Amoore, Louise and Raley, Rita, *Securing with Algorithms, Knowledge, Decision, Sovereignty*, *Security Dialogue*. (2017) 48:3-10.

Amoore, L. *The Line of Beauty: Security's objects and the form of data. Theory, Culture and Society*. 2013.

likely to be made by programmers and mathematicians who write computer code as they are by uniformed border agents.¹⁷⁰ The border that Amoore critically examines is virtual. The bordering practices of the virtual border are technical, based on assessments of risk and use data, such as those of the United Kingdom and United States of America.¹⁷¹ Amoore proposes that in the global, data-driven system, border lines are drawn via the association between data, and associational logic alerts analysts and border guards.¹⁷² An alert for instance, would resemble the following: ‘If past travel to Pakistan and flight paid by a third part, then risk score of ***; if paid ticket in cash and this meal choice on this flight route...’¹⁷³ Despite the technological sophistication of the virtual border, what is striking is that these bordering practices continue to rely on real/imagined stereotypes and prejudice that are translated or ‘coded’ into the virtual avatar of the border but are acted out on the ground through detention or interrogation. Further, although the border has now moved into the realm of screens and data, as a security practice it does not detach itself from the primordial forms of othering, or binary notions of ‘us’ and ‘them’, perpetuated by territorial borders. Additionally, despite this shift in the location and methods of bordering that have rendered the border virtual for Western states like the UK and USA, the question remains, for whom have these borders shifted? Are technological changes adequate to explain how the border shifts or are there other practices that can shift the border? The realm of the virtual, although sophisticated, to some extent explains the borders in place for the non-West but not of the non-West.

Responding to the problem of outlining changes to border practices and border actors, Chris Rumford ‘suggests a radically transformed landscape of borders and bordering.’¹⁷⁴

Doty, R. L. ‘Bare Life: border-crossing deaths and spaces of moral alibi’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 29, (2011) 599-612.

Jones, *Border Walls: Security and the War on Terror in the United States, India and Israel*.

J. Shewly Hosna, “Abandoned Spaces and Bare Life in the Enclaves of the India-Bangladesh Border,” *Political Geography* 32 (2012): 23–31.

¹⁷⁰ Johnson et al., “Interventions on Rethinking ‘the Border’ in Border Studies.”

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid. 64

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Rumford, *Cosmopolitan Borders*. 12

Rumford proposes a multiperspectival study of borders, to be accomplished by introducing two ideas; the vernacularisation of borders and borderwork. The vernacularization of borders de-emphasises state bordering, securitisation, and the regulation of mobilities, placing these alongside the role of borders in ‘the politics of everyday fear’ and the actions of citizens who both contest nation-state bordering practices and institute their own version of borders.¹⁷⁵ Borderwork can be understood as the way ordinary people contribute to the processes of bordering. To demonstrate, Rumford provides the example of the UK town of Melton Mowbray that successfully achieved EU Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) status for its specific brand of pork pies. This, according to Rumford, ‘effectively created a tangible but semi-visible non-state border around the town, outside of which pies could not be branded as Melton Mowbray. The presence of this border would not be obvious to most, while to those being bordered out, it is very much visible and real.’¹⁷⁶ Rumford’s concepts of borderwork and the vernacularization of borders confront the state centrality of borders and provide starting points for alternative border imaginaries. However, the substantive illustrations of borderwork and vernacularization remain empirically thin.

While I concur that borders and boundaries can be conflated, I deviate from Rumford’s reasoning for this conflation, as Rumford views boundary categories like ethnicity, religion, and race as non-issues.¹⁷⁷ Rumford deems the potential ‘danger of the inflexibility which would accompany the assertion of fixed or unchanging meanings to borders and boundaries’ as problematic.¹⁷⁸ Conversely, I would argue that this inflexibility associated to borders and boundaries is precisely what could offer insight into *how* borderwork and the vernacularisation of borders work through social and political practices rather than just economic ones.¹⁷⁹ The omission of boundaries from the study of borders leaves borderwork and the vernacularisation of borders as sanitised and stunted. On the other hand, Lamont

¹⁷⁵ Reece Jones and Corey Johnson, eds., *Placing the Border in Everyday Life* (England & USA: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014). 16

¹⁷⁶ Anthony Cooper and Chris Perkins, “Borders and Status-Functions: An Institutional Approach to the Study of Borders,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 15, no. 1 (n.d.): 55–71.

¹⁷⁷ Rumford, *Cosmopolitan Borders*. 15

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

and Molnar note that boundaries and borders are not only twin concepts but ‘boundaries can be the most fertile thinking tools that capture a fundamental social process, that of relationality.’¹⁸⁰ Anssi Paasi, however, draws attention to the relational approach to borders. He addresses this key element of relationality, and the social processes that form borders in depth as he views borders in relation to ‘people’, ‘nation’, and ‘culture’ and the ‘site’ of the border as related to the ‘complex, perpetually ongoing, hegemonic nation-building process.’¹⁸¹ Paasi attenuates the significance of the identity, nation, and borders in terms discursive and emotional landscapes of bordering. Most notably, Paasi does not rule out the modalities of borders, the nation-state, and relationality they perpetuate.

Changing bordering practices have been associated with the emergence of a post-linear notion of the border. A key grievance within critical border studies remains the supposed ‘Lines in the Sand’ metaphor that has been challenged extensively by Mark Salter. Salter identifies a ‘romantic nostalgia for the border as a line’ and discards it for its supposed weakness as a theoretical tool.¹⁸² Salter is not alone in problematising the very structure of the international political system that relies on the divide of inside/outside.¹⁸³ He criticises the inability of concepts of the border as a line to provide analytical purchase on the functions of inclusion and exclusion or explain the co-constitution of the inside and outside. Instead, Salter proposes the idea of the suture as an alternative to the line. He argues that ‘the “/” between inside/outside: the sovereign border read as a suture, that knits the outside and inside together remedies the solipsistic tendencies to view borders either exclusively as internal or external.’¹⁸⁴ The manoeuvre from line to suture diversifies our understanding of the border and ruptures the internal/external divide. It enables an analysis of bordering in a way that admits the changes in contemporary practices but also reaffirms the unique

¹⁸⁰ Michele Lamont and Virag Molnar, “The Study of Boundaries in Social Sciences,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 28 (2002): 167–95. 169

¹⁸¹ Anssi Paasi, “Border Studies Reanimated: Going beyond the Territorial/relational Divide,” *Environment and Planning A* 48 (2012): 2303–2309.

¹⁸² Salter, “Theory of the /: The Suture and Critical Border Studies.” 10

¹⁸³ Rumford suggests the idea of ‘seeing like a border’ Chris Rumford, “Towards a Multiperspectival Study of Borders,” *Geopolitics* 17 (2012): 887–902.

¹⁸⁴ Salter, “Theory of the /: The Suture and Critical Border Studies.” 12

world-building characteristics of sovereign borders.¹⁸⁵ While Salter's challenge to conventional understandings of the international system is relevant for asking the question of what borders do it is still problematic. Even if the border is better understood as a practice, it would be naïve to suggest that borderlines are devoid of bordering. Bordering practices tend to originate from ideas of the borderline. Hence even as we acknowledge that linear notions of borders can be misleading and problematic, and that the simplicity of the 'border as line' metaphor does not capture nuance, we still need to ask, why and for whom do border lines persist? Moreover, we cannot simply do away with the line as Salter suggests but rather, the question to ask is why do linear notions of the border persist despite its non-linear reality? To answer these questions, let us turn to borders in postcolonial South Asia.

Lines, Partitions, and Borders in postcolonial South Asia

At the border between India and Pakistan in Pittal, Jammu and Kashmir, an intelligence officer explained the border issues through the disparity in classification, he said 'we call it an international boundary but they [Pakistan] do not agree to it, this is the biggest issue here.'¹⁸⁶ The officer presented the dispute interestingly, drawing a distinction between India's border with Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir, and the same border elsewhere, in Punjab, Gujarat, and Rajasthan, where in his words 'division *theek se hui thi*'¹⁸⁷ (division was done properly).¹⁸⁸ By using the term 'division' here, he implied Partition. Struck by the idea of '*theek se* division', or "proper" division and the persistence of Partition, several questions emerge; can division ever be conducted *theek se* or properly? More specifically, what does proper division mean? The idea of the border as a dividing line is implicit in the articulation, conceptualisation, and practice here. Partition may have bequeathed the idea of the dividing border line, but its relevance and continuity seems to affect contemporary border politics on the ground even today. In this context, it is imperative to determine how

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. 9

¹⁸⁶ Fieldwork notes

¹⁸⁷ By *theek se* or properly the officer meant considering the demographic population and natural conditions.

¹⁸⁸ Fieldwork notes

and to what extent Partition structures and impacts contemporary postcolonial nationhood, territory, identity, and borders in South Asia. In general, border studies has been surprisingly reluctant to engage historically with borders, either by drawing connections between broader ‘agendas’ and specific historical cases, or by analysing the effects of histories on concepts and practices. This section overcomes this limitation by presenting a brief historical background to the geo-cultural specificity of borders in postcolonial South Asia.¹⁸⁹

History informs us that the division or Partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 and 1971 was neither *theek* (proper) nor done *theek se* (properly).¹⁹⁰ The emergence of postcolonial states in South Asia hinged on the drawing of ‘nice clean lines’ that divided the Indian subcontinent into India, and East and West Pakistan.¹⁹¹ Independence from British colonial rule was eclipsed by a violent and brutal Partition that carved out two separate independent postcolonial nation-states based on irreconcilable religious differences. Overnight 12 million Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, found themselves on the wrong side of border leading to the largest human migration in history.¹⁹² Much of the historiography of the Partition literature uncovers the messy and abrupt materialisation of these divisions. In *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan*, Yasmin Khan associates the “moment” of Partition with the first mention of Partition in a public address by Viceroy Atlee on 3rd June 1947, two months prior to Independence, where no exact details were outlined.¹⁹³ She noted, ‘no maps were made public, it was left to the

¹⁸⁹ For an excellent perspective on the absence of history in border studies see Liam O’Dowd, “From a ‘Borderless World’ to a ‘World of Borders’: ‘Bringing History Back In,’” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28 (2010): 1031–50.

¹⁹⁰ Historian Antara Datta argues for the inclusion of 1971 as a seminal Partition in South Asian historiography in her book *Refugees and Borders in South Asia: The Great Exodus of 1971*, Routledge: Abingdon, 2013.

¹⁹¹ Walker and Krishna, “Partition: On the Discriminations of Modernity.”

¹⁹² An estimated 75,000 women were abducted and raped by men of religions different from their own and an estimated two million people were murdered.

For a quantitative analysis of the migration flows during Partition see Prashant Bharadwaj, Asim Khwaja, and Atif Mian, “The Big March: Migratory Flows after the Partition of India,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 43, no. 35 (2008): 39–49.

¹⁹³ Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007). 1

newspapers to publish their own creative interpretations of exactly where a new borderline, snaking through Bengal in the east and Punjab in the west, might fall once the country was divided.’¹⁹⁴ In fact, the ‘real’ line was not revealed until 17th August 1947, two days *after* the Independence of the new states.¹⁹⁵ The procedures for Partition were ‘contrived and instantly put in to effect’, squabbling over who would get what, right from the ‘rivers of the subcontinent, roads, bridges, governmental paraphernalia, right down to typewriters and files’, Joya Chatterji writes.¹⁹⁶ Khan notes that ‘the border was devised from a distance; the land, villages and communities to be divided were not visited or inspected by the imperial map-makers, the British judge, Cyril Radcliffe, who arrived in India on 8th July to carry out the task and stayed in the country only six weeks.’¹⁹⁷ Lucy Chester’s *Borders and Conflict in South Asia: The Radcliffe Boundary Commission and the Partition of Punjab* offers perspective on the British predicament. In the book, she states that ‘in the

According to Gyanendra Pandey, the three Partitions are as follows; firstly, the Lahore Resolution in 1940 when the Muslim League proposed the idea of a separate state for Muslims. Second, early 1947, when Sikhs, Hindus and Congress Leadership demanded the partitioning of Bengal and Punjab and lastly, August 1947, when Partition happened. Antara Datta on the other hand would also argue that the creation of Bangladesh from East Pakistan also marked another partition in South Asia’s historiography. Thus, even the idea of a Partition is deeply contested.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. 3

¹⁹⁵ Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).2 Lucy Chester argues that this was because the last Viceroy Mountbatten officially maintained the line that he did not want to ruin the joyous occasion of Independence when this was also because he was avoiding the appearance of British responsibility for the disorder that inevitably follow the announcement. On the contrary, it is believed that the British left before the borders were announced because they did not want to be present to witness the violence or be held responsible for it. See Chester, Lucy. *Borders and conflict in South Asia: the Radcliffe Boundary Commission and the Partition of Punjab*, Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2009. 106

¹⁹⁶ Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947-1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). 20

¹⁹⁷ Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan*, . 3

For an excellent and in-depth analysis and historical study of the ‘high politics’ surrounding the drawing of the Radcliffe Line see Lucy Chester’s *Borders and Conflicts in South Asia*.

absence of any defined proposals, let alone any agreed line, British authorities decided to proceed towards independence on the basis of a ‘notional boundary.’¹⁹⁸

Lines were drawn through Bengal and Punjab, based solely on the distribution of Muslim-majority districts as defined in the 1941 census.¹⁹⁹ Moreover, the permanence of these lines was as unknown as their administrative utility.²⁰⁰ While this exposes the flimsy and presumptuous historical foundations of South Asia’s contemporary borders, it remains important to ascertain the meaning of Partition beyond its spatiality. For instance, in both the literature and political discourse, the creation of the border is often framed using metaphors of a bloody amputation, vivisection, ‘dismemberment of national territory’, or birth.²⁰¹ The use of such colourful language perhaps bears testament to the visceral impact of Partition.²⁰² More so, these articulations reproduced the national body politic in two ways. First, the brutal sexual violence that ensued during Partition territorialised bodies of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh women and equated to the transgression of communal borderlines.²⁰³ Feminist scholars like Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin illustrate how the territorialisation of women’s bodies through sexual violence established the sacralised

¹⁹⁸ Lucy. Chester, *Borders and Conflict in South Asia: The Radcliffe Boundary Commission and the Partition of Punjab* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009). 12

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. 12-13

Although anthropologist Willem van Schendel demolishes the myth that the border demarcated Hindus from Muslims, he argues that this was true for only 26% of its length. For the most of it there were either Muslims or Hindus on both sides. See *The Bengal Borderland* chapter 3. Similarly, historian Joya Chatterji through in-depth archival work challenges these established myths of Partition, thereby elucidating that the ground realities challenge the ‘official historical’ narrative.

²⁰⁰ Ibid. 13

²⁰¹ In Jawaharlal Nehru’s (India’s first Prime Minister) famous speech during independence, he referred to Partition as the ‘pains of labour’. He stated ‘Before the birth of freedom we have endured all the pains of labour and our hearts are heavy with the memory of this sorrow. Some of those pains continue even now.’ He also refers to India as a Mother and says, ‘we have to build the noble mansion of free India where all her children may dwell.’ These ideas of nation, natality, and Mother India are important as they continue to frame popular and nationalist perspectives of the Indian nation.

²⁰² On the other side of the newly formed border, even Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the first Governor General of Pakistan, described Pakistan as ‘maimed, mutilated and moth-eaten Pakistan.’ Sanjay Chaturvedi, “Process of Othering in the Case of India and Pakistan,” *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie* 93, no. 2 (2002): 149–59. 153

²⁰³ In addition to mass murder and exodus Partition also lead to innumerable cases of sexual violence and rape by men on the women of the opposite communities.

territory of “Mother India” and the “pure” bodies of women as equivalent spaces upon which the nationalist values of honour and purity were imprinted.²⁰⁴ This territorialisation of women’s bodies is evident in the Indian government’s Abducted Person (Recovery and Restoration) Bill, whereby Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim women were exchanged like territory between India and Pakistan in 1949.²⁰⁵ Analogously, Itty Abraham argues that ‘recovering abducted women was a way of restoring to the national body what had been taken away, even if the women in question didn’t want to be returned and even if there was nowhere to put them once restored.’²⁰⁶ Abraham contends that ‘gender, as much as land borders and maritime boundaries can become the focus of territorializing practices aimed at establishing a clear and dividing line between “us” and “them”’.²⁰⁷

Second, the surgical language of Partition imparts a sense of finality to the drawing of lines and reproduces an anthropomorphic view of the Indian nation-state as Mother India. The notion of *Bharat Mata* is a ‘metaphor for the land and people of India as a whole that epitomises the culture’s feminine values of grace, wisdom, and civilizational depth.’²⁰⁸ However, ‘since this icon of the postcolonial Indian nation is derived from the Hindu iconography of the all-nurturing Mother goddess, with even a temple dedicated to the nation in Varanasi, the city of temples, it remains a problematic concept as it may be seen as exclusive of other faiths.’²⁰⁹ This trope of nation-as-woman or the anthropomorphic distortion of Mother India or *Bharat Mata* act as exclusionary tools, feminising and Hinduising the nation and territory. This feminisation of the nation- its territory considered holy and pure- and simultaneous territorialisation of the female bodies affects how borders,

²⁰⁴ See Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*.

Kamala Bhasin and Ritu Menon, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India’s Partition* (New Delhi: Kali Publishing, 1998).

²⁰⁵ The Government of India Fact Finding Organisation stated that Muslims had abducted 33,000 Hindu or Sikh women and the Pakistan government claimed that Hindu or Sikh men had abducted 50,000 women; of these 12,000 women had been recovered in India, while 6,000 were recovered in Pakistan by 15th December 1949.

²⁰⁶ Abraham, *How India Became Territorial: Foreign Policy, Diaspora and Geopolitics*. 41

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ S Jassal Tewari and E Ben-Ari, eds., *The Partition Motif in Contemporary Conflicts* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2007). 44.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

physical and imagined, are produced, policed, upheld and ‘protected’ in contemporary India. Feminising territory, the body politic and the nation, as well as the violent territorialisation of women’s bodies,²¹⁰ allows for women to be conflated with the nation’s territory and considered as something that- even today- needs male ‘protection’, policing and surveillance. In this context, any trespass onto the ‘sacralised territory’ of the nation or women (like mixed marriages) are reasons for securitisation and “communal fencing.”²¹¹ Furthermore, the simultaneous territorialisation of the nation and women make it possible to explore the ways in which ideational and imagined borders are camouflaged within the multilayered inclusions/exclusions of gender and religion.

It remains important not to monumentalise/demonumentalise the particularity and significance of Partition. That said, neither should we underestimate its centrality to the physical and imagined borders of South Asia. The paradox of ‘proper’ division reflects the contradictions of the simultaneous failure and success of Partition. The birth of the modern states of India and Pakistan through partitioned Independence implies that the ‘triumph of political difference’ is foundational to their statehood.²¹² The “success” of partition is giving the impression of clear-cut borders, creating separate territorial entities and nation states: India, Pakistan, and subsequently Bangladesh. Simultaneously, its failure lies in its creation of unstable majority/minority identities, notions of belonging, disputed territories, and temporary, ‘unsealed’ borders. The conundrum of Partition is this paradox of ‘proper’ division that both oversimplified and complicated religious difference and communalism in South Asia. While it momentarily “solved” or contained the problem of difference by the creation of separate Hindu and Muslim nation-states in the subcontinent, it rested on false assumptions that territorial division/separation would be clear-cut and permanent. On the contrary, separation or friction continues to maintain a form of contact, and the borders are the precise example of this impossibility. Moreover, the disputed border, considered a

²¹⁰ Not just during Partition, but also during bouts of communal violence and riots in India, Hindu and Muslim women are often targeted by the opposite community’s men.

²¹¹ It is not uncommon for military and paramilitary officers and to chant *Bharat Mata ki Jai* (Long Live Mother India) on the field to motivate themselves.

²¹² Chaturvedi, “Process of Othering in the Case of India and Pakistan.” 151

remnant of unfinished Partition is also reflective of a disputed and contested self. Overall, this historical insight into Partition highlights how the creation of borders and the drawing of lines helps forge the relationship between the nation-state, identity and territory in postcolonial South Asia. It elucidates the triumph of a 'logic of Partition' that ascertained 'how places and people on the subcontinent should be territorially differentiated and fixed as nations and where the boundaries between the 'self' and the 'others' ought to be drawn.'²¹³ Paradoxically, the Partition literature illuminates the failure of drawing border lines, yet, contemporary borders of South Asia retains linear notions of the border rather than problematising them.

Borders, Identity and Territory: A Triadic Relationship

The significance of Partition indicates a triadic relationship between borders, territory, and identity that is inescapable but equally problematic. Inescapable, because to some extent borders, territory and identity are married to the idea of the Westphalian postcolonial state in South Asia, and problematic, because it makes alternatives to this triad difficult to envisage. In 'Boundaries and Territoriality in South Asia: From Historical Comparisons to Theoretical Considerations', Atul Mishra ascertains that the question of borders in South Asia is closely interlaced with the issue of territoriality.²¹⁴ Given that colonialism was an enterprise entrenched in territorial conquest, it bequeathed a sense of territorial identity whereby identity is tied to territory.²¹⁵ Moreover, since decolonisation was so inextricably linked to territorial anxieties (over losses and gains), violation of territory has been deemed the ultimate loss of sovereignty.²¹⁶ In his often-cited article in *Alternatives*, Sankaran Krishna diagnoses this tendency as 'cartographic anxiety.'²¹⁷ For Krishna this is characteristic of postcolonial nations that are suspended forever between 'former colony' and 'not-yet nation', where the physical preservation of the border becomes synonymous

²¹³ Ibid. 151

²¹⁴ Atul Mishra, "Boundaries and Territoriality in South Asia: From Historical Comparisons to Theoretical Considerations," *International Studies* 45, no. 2 (2009): 105–32.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid. 106

²¹⁷ Krishna, "Cartographic Anxiety: Mapping the Body Politic in India."

with the state of the union.²¹⁸ Most crucially, Krishna questions the violence that reinforces the territorial sovereignty and body politic of the Indian nation-state through illustrations of micro politics, epistemic and physical violence that produce the border. Krishna inspects ‘how cartography produces borders, the arbitrariness involved in the creation of normality, and the fluid definitions of space and place that prevail in the midst of efforts to hegemonize territory.’²¹⁹

Itty Abraham’s *How India Became Territorial* identifies territorial integrity as a necessary condition for postcolonial nation-states’ entry as recognised members of international society. He notes that ‘territory comes to mediate the caesura that splits nation from state, and hence the postcolonial world is marked by obsessive anxiety about territorial “integrity.”’²²⁰ In seeking to demystify the centrality of territorial sovereignty in International Relations, rather than focusing on the border as such, Abraham is drawn by ‘the emotional and affective meaning invested in territory deemed national by state and its people.’²²¹ Consequently, Abraham contends that for most postcolonial states, territorial “loss” threatens not only to undermine their standing as legitimate states, but also to expose the fault lines of their history and the impermanence of the fiction of the nation.²²² While Abraham studies territory and the Westphalian model of statehood in postcolonial India historically, he also offers theoretical insight into why territorial disputes and the violation of sovereignty seem existential. However, the problem inherent with this account is Abraham’s own subscription to nationalist ideas about territory. For instance, Abraham argues that ‘until India unterritorializes its way of thinking and seeing the world, Pakistan can never be seen as anything but a fundamental crisis’ because Pakistan’s continued existence represents an on-going contradiction of the territorially bound and imagined

²¹⁸ Ibid. 508

²¹⁹ Ibid. 514

²²⁰ Abraham, *How India Became Territorial: Foreign Policy, Diaspora and Geopolitics*. 11-12

²²¹ Ibid. 14

²²² Ibid. 146

Indian nation-state.²²³ Instead of problematising or critically questioning these emotional and affective meanings invested in territory, Abraham seems to concur with them.

Furthermore, drawing from the second dimension of borders identified earlier in this chapter, the politics of the border, Abraham's argument for the territorial straightjacket does not allow for the possibility of what Sugata Bose calls 'a conceptual shift' occurring at the level of the nation-state that is demonstrated by the passing of the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA).²²⁴ In an interview in March 2015, three months prior to the LBA, Bose stated to me, 'in some ways *for the first time, instead of focussing on territory*, and India is going to notionally lose 17,000 acres of its land, it's a notional loss because India did not have actual possessionary control over this territory, instead of focussing on territory, *we have been focussing on human beings*, if we can bring about this conceptual shift we can solve more intractable problems.' (emphasis added)²²⁵ On a similar note, the Chair of the External Affairs Committee who lobbied in favour of the LBA, Dr Shashi Tharoor in an interview stated that: 'This is really a no brainer because *we are giving away territory that we don't actually control* these are chunks of land in Bangladesh, there is no Indian Police no Indian Customs, no Indian flags, no Indian Post Office and no Indian administration. So, it is purely BJP chauvinism that prevented them agreeing to us when they were in Opposition.'²²⁶ Implicit in Tharoor's statement is the distinction between land and territory as the technology of rule of the nation-state.²²⁷ The passing of the LBA could be attributed to the notional, rather than actual, loss of territory that both Bose and Tharoor emphasise, but it equally shows that even the present BJP led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government, who previously invested heavily in the narrative of territory as blood and soil, has loosened its grip on the idea of the nation-state as a territorial entity. These insights emphasise the relevance and prominence of the second dimension of borders or the ontological dimension, articulated in the introduction of this chapter. Differently put,

²²³ Ibid. 18

²²⁴ Interview with author, March 21, 2015, Kolkata.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Interview with author, September 11, 2015, New Delhi.

²²⁷ Cons, *Sensitive Space: Fragmented Territory at the India-Bangladesh Border*.

borders *are* political realities that are mercurial in their significance and implications. Simply put, political changes can mark conceptual shifts that ought to be included when approaching the study of borders.

Having said that, the passing of the LBA is still a rare occurrence. This is why it is so significant. Anxiety over the creation and maintenance of borders continues to lie at the heart of discussions of violence, social conflict, and contemporary politics in South Asia.²²⁸ Jason Cons manages to navigate the tightrope between articulations of postcolonial territory in South Asia tactfully. He states, ‘the enclaves embody a telling impasse that haunts postcolonial territory in South Asia— namely, the inability to disentangle material needs and realities of people living on the bleeding edge of state space from nationalist imaginations of blood and soil that are often indexed to the unfinished processes of Partition.’²²⁹ Instead, he suggests that rather than thinking of postcolonial territory as a merely descriptive category, it is more productive to think of it as a single analytic frame that responds to the securitisation of space, but is not over-determined by them.²³⁰ Cons believes that if we are to reimagine territory and region, both perspectives are necessary because ‘thinking these positions together at once exposes the mystifications of territory in nationalist debate and untangles the impasse of viewing space through a nationalist lens by bringing mobility, spatial regulation, violence, and competing territorialities within a single analytic frame.’²³¹ Simply put, Cons argues that to merely reject ‘nationalist framings of space is to misunderstand the very processes that make spaces like the enclaves such intractable issues. Yet, to view the enclaves solely through such framings is to miss the idea that people living in sensitive space engage territory in ways not explainable solely within state or nationalist logics.’²³² Finally, what is important, according to Cons, ‘is to understand the relationality between these two registers of territory and, moreover, to be attentive to this relationality’s fluctuating dynamics. Such attention destabilizes uniform

²²⁸ Sanyal and Cons, “Geographies at the Margins: Borders in South Asia - an Introduction.” 6

²²⁹ Cons, “Impasse and Opportunity: Reframing Postcolonial Territory at the India-Bangladesh Border.” 3.

²³⁰ Ibid. 6

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid.

conceptualizations of territory and region in favour of more fluid and negotiated visions.’²³³ This thesis draws from Cons’ search for a single analytic frame to negotiate the vagaries of territory and borders in postcolonial South Asia.

The literature on borders in South Asia is vivid, diverse, and rich and can be said to follow either of the two territorial conceptualisations and their resultant tendencies. In other words, border studies ‘either choose to engage the broad, macro historical processes of border and state making, or the micropolitics of life in the shadow of state control.’²³⁴ In this vein, mainstream scholarship and political discourse conceive of borders as problems.²³⁵ India’s borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh are regarded as existential problems and territorial vulnerabilities that need to be secured, ‘fixed’, and sealed.²³⁶ In practice, this perspective has yielded one of the most militarised borders in the world today. The mainstream security literature compresses the border between India and Pakistan into the complex conflict in Kashmir. Here, the border/LOC is married to the ‘hard politics’ of the border dispute.²³⁷ According to these perspectives, the border is a hindrance. It is an issue that has led to the hyphenation of India with Pakistan on the global stage and is consequently viewed as an obstacle to India’s global stature.²³⁸ The border dispute is conflated with the conflict over

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ See Raspal S. Khosa, “The Siachen Glacier Dispute: Imbroglia on the Roof of the World,” *Contemporary South Asia* 8, no. 2 (2007): 187–209.

N.S. Jamwal, “Management of Land Borders,” *Strategic Analysis* 28, no. 1 (2004): 1–36.

²³⁶ Depending on the government in power, the border policies and politics are framed within broader securitised and Hindu nationalist narratives. For a foreign policy account of the border issue between India and Bangladesh during the Hindu nationalist party, the BJP’s rule, see Sinderpal Singh, “‘Border Crossings and Islamic Terrorists’: Representing Bangladesh in Indian Foreign Policy During the BJP Era,” *India Review* 8, no. 2 (2009): 144–62.

²³⁷ See Gautam Das, *Securing India’s Borders: Challenges and Policy Options* (New Delhi: Centre for Land Warfare Studies, 2011).

Koithara Verghese, “Soft Border Approach in Kashmir: How It Can Be Made to Work,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 40, no. 18 (2005): 1804–6.

Sumit Ganguly, *The Crisis in Kashmir: Portents of War, Hopes of Peace* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Happymon Jacob, “Contours of the Contemporary Kashmir Conflict: Geopolitics, Soft Borders and India-Pakistan Relations?,” *Eurasia Border Review* 2, no. 1 (2011): 17–34.

²³⁸ See Rohan Mukherjee and David Malone, “Indian Foreign Policy and Contemporary Security Challenges,” *International Affairs* 87, no. 1 (2011): 87–104.

Kashmir, which while interrelated, are not essentially the same issue. Border skirmishes and infiltration from Pakistan are interpreted as acts of war and Bangladeshi Muslim infiltrators are viewed as ‘Trojan horses’, skewing the demographics of Hindu India.²³⁹ The securitised narrative of the border is interlaced with concerns about the existential threat posed by cross-border infiltration and cross-border terrorism, concerns that have led to obsession with the territorial unity and integrity of the Indian state. As a result, Navtej Purewal notes, ‘explicit military conflict has become the crudest aspect of border maintenance.’²⁴⁰

The mainstream literature on the Kashmir issue has focused on territory rather than borders or their impact on people’s lives.²⁴¹ The inability to dissociate the border from the territorial conflict has reified the border and exacerbated divisions, while India’s aggressive militarisation around the border has alienated the inhabitants of the region.²⁴² In *Contested Coastlines*, Charu Gupta and Mukul Sharma demonstrate the expansion of cartographic anxiety from land borders to include maritime borders. Opposing the literature’s focus on ‘big’ and ‘visible’ points of conflict like Kashmir, Kargil and various Indo-Pakistani wars, Gupta and Sharma draw our attention to the ‘less spectacular’, ‘invisible’, ‘marginal maybe banal, common, and almost unnoticeable, but equally insidious forms of conflict.’²⁴³ Using the example of arrests of innocent fishermen in the name of border protection, Gupta and Sharma’s work is particularly novel for characterising and conceptualising India’s maritime

²³⁹ Sujata Ramachandran, “Of Boundaries and Border Crossings Interventions: Undocumented Bangladeshi ‘Infiltrators’ and the Hegemony of Hindu Nationalism in India,” *International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 1, no. 2: The Partition of the Indian Sub-Continent (1999): 235–53.

²⁴⁰ Navtej Purewal, “The Indo-Pak Border: Displacements, Aggressions and Transgressions,” *Contemporary South Asia* 12, no. 4 (2003): 539–56.

²⁴¹ Chitralekha Zutshi, “An Ongoing Partition: Histories, Borders, and the Politics of Vivisection in Jammu and Kashmir,” *Contemporary South Asia* 23, no. 5 (2015): 266–75. 271

²⁴² Paula Banerjee, *Borders, Histories and Existences: Gender and Beyond* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2010). 63

²⁴³ Charu Gupta and Mukul Sharma, *Contested Coastlines: Fisherfolk, Nations and Border in South Asia* (New Delhi and Abingdon: Routledge, 2008). 3

borders and conveying the everyday violence and human rights abuses suffered by fisher folk on account of crossing invisible borders at sea.²⁴⁴

Critical of this militarisation, Paula Banerjee notes that despite the volatility of the Line of Control (LOC) between India and Pakistan, the border has nevertheless become ‘ideologically sacrosanct’ causing political instability, conflict and alienation in the region.²⁴⁵ In other words, the control of this border through violence and force has become an end in itself, with the border itself providing the rationale for its continued existence.²⁴⁶ The ideological sacrosanctity of the border poses the question: to what extent are physical political borders ideationally upheld? As Chitralekha Zutshi states, ‘despite not existing on the official map of India or being represented as dotted line on Pakistani and international maps, the LOC exists as a powerful ideological and material construct that embodies the incessant rehearsal of violent state and non-state imperatives in the region’.²⁴⁷

Likewise, playing on the disaggregation between marginal locations and national imaginations, Mona Bhan and Ravina Aggarwal and Radhika Gupta’s work asserts the new role of Kargil and Ladakh as warzones that have become fixed in the national imagination.²⁴⁸ Bhan and Aggarwal employ the framework of civil-military relations to suggest that project *Sadbhavana*, a military goodwill program by the Indian state, persisted as ‘a panopticon to control border citizens through its veneer of development and welfare ideology.’²⁴⁹ In this way, this work shows how the margins, although geographically and administratively excluded, are drawn into the national imaginary and controlled by the presence of the military and their everyday practices of state re-enactment. Their work

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Banerjee, *Borders, Histories and Existences: Gender and Beyond*. 63

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Zutshi, “An Ongoing Partition: Histories, Borders, and the Politics of Vivisection in Jammu and Kashmir,” 2015.

²⁴⁸ Radhika Gupta, “Allegiance and Alienation: Border Dynamics in Kargil,” in *Borderland Lives in Northern South Asia*, ed. David Gellner (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 54.

²⁴⁹ Ravina Aggarwal and Mona Bhan, “‘Disarming Violence’: Development, Democracy, and Security on the Borders of India.’ *The Journal of Asian Studies* 68, no. 2 (2009) 538.

empirically illustrates what Balibar refers to as the ‘interiorisation’ of the border.²⁵⁰ Moreover, it shows that borders shift not just through security practices as the critical border studies literature suggests, but also through the way that national imaginaries and cognitive spaces are constructed.

Anthropological perspectives provide rich ethnographic insights into the lived, gritty realities of migrant subjectivities and border life to challenge what David Gellner’s calls ‘the methodological nationalism’ of the postcolonial nation-state.²⁵¹ Willem van Schendel’s monumental 2005 work *The Bengal Borderland* heralded the anthropology of border literature by leading debates on marginality, the nation-state, identity and belonging in postcolonial South Asia. In this incisive study on the ‘killer border’ between India and Bangladesh, Schendel analyses the tremendous impact of the border and everyday violence it enacts on ordinary people who are often excluded or forgotten by the dominant narratives.²⁵² He argues that ‘borderland studies have been deeply marked by the territorialist epistemology of the social sciences (the tendency to study the world as a patchwork of state-defined societies, economies and cultures) and its corollary, methodological territorialism (the tendency to analyse spatial form as self-enclosed geographical units).’²⁵³

The anthropology of borders literature problematises the inheritance of colonial borders and the artificiality of partitioned borders through rich empirical evidence of ethnic and cultural affinities to challenge the state-centric notions of borders as fixed and territorially stable.²⁵⁴ Importantly, this literature contrasts the state’s cartographic anxiety with the

²⁵⁰ É. Balibar, “World Borders, Political Borders,” *PMLA* 117, no. 1, Special Topic: Mobile Citizens, Media States (2002): 76.

²⁵¹ Gellner, *Borderland Lives in Northern South Asia: Non-State Perspectives*. 4

²⁵² *Ibid.* 7

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ See Hussain, *Boundaries Undermined: The Ruins of Progress on the Indo-Bangladesh Border*,. Sahana Ghosh, “Cross-Border Activities in Everyday Life: The Bengal Borderland,” *Contemporary South Asia* 19, no. 1 (2011): 49–60.

Malini Sur, “Through Metal Fences: Material Mobility and the Politics of Transnationality at Borders,” *Mobilities* 8, no. 1 (2012): 70–89.

Malini Sur, ““Divided Bodies,”” *Economic and Political Weekly* 49, no. 13 (2014): 31–35.

simultaneous ironic lack of concern ‘on the ground.’²⁵⁵ Challenging the anthropology of borders perspectives, however, Anastasia Piliavsky’s ethnography of the Kanjar community in Rajasthan takes borderland theory to task to refocus on the concept of the border. She argues that ‘in their preoccupation with defining the limits of borderlands as substantive entities, as territorially, socially, linguistically, and politically discrete zones – borderland theorists tend to forget about borders, which are the root analytical objects.’²⁵⁶ Piliavsky’s research suggests ideas of borders as relational that enclose as well as divide.²⁵⁷ Confronting the dichotomy of borders as either frontier-like situations or “borderlands”, she argues for broader conceptions of ‘border scenarios.’²⁵⁸ For Piliavsky, borders have different meanings in different circumstances and can be perceived as fringes, frontiers, or national heartlands.²⁵⁹ The crucial point she makes is ‘whether dotted with gun men and lined with barbed wire or physically unmarked (as in the Kanjar case) border do not necessarily generate cross-border bonds but often produce differences, whether between Indian and Pakistani citizens or between gangs.’²⁶⁰ Piliavsky’s two propositions, the border *as* difference, and the re/location of borders within the national heartland, are both crucial for questioning dominant critical anthropological perspectives’ fixed ideas of borders. Simultaneously, it leads to the question: what other forms of relationality do border scenarios produce?

Similarly, Sara H. Smith’s ethnographic work on the border and memory in Leh and Ladakh uses a broader and more mobile conceptualisation of the border. She addresses the interplay between urban space and intimate geopolitics by drawing on the work of Reece

B Kalir and Malini Sur, “Bamboo Baskets and Barricades: Gendered Landscapes at the India–Bangladesh Borderlands,” in *Transnational Flows and Permissive Politics: Ethnographies of Human Mobility in Asia*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 127–50.

²⁵⁵ Ranabir Samaddar, *A Biography of the Indian Nation: 1947-1997* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2001). 131

²⁵⁶ Piliavsky, “Borders without Borderlands: On the Social Reproduction of State Demarcation in Rajasthan.” 27

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid. 41

Jones and Allison Mountz, to ascertain how ‘borders effect shift geographically and are part of other bounding processes.’²⁶¹ Smith argues that the intimate and architectural geopolitics is based on the unresolved border, the perceived vulnerability of Jammu and Kashmir to territorial dissolution, and the anticipation of religious nationalist conflict that has long haunted South Asia, particularly vividly since partition.²⁶² Through this work, Smith draws attention to ‘when and how political borders are recalled and embodied in relationships between people, in the spaces that we inhabit, and in the interpretation of those spaces.’²⁶³ Smith describes this as a border sensibility, which she defines as ‘a multiple-sense of being on the edge of the nation and on the edge of an uncertain future.’²⁶⁴

Smith focuses on the transversality of borders to explore the haunting presence of the border that permits ‘a particular set of political narratives to take root, even when the border is out of sight.’²⁶⁵ This can drive attempts to bound and defend not only the physical borders of the nation, but the boundaries of the body, and of “communities,” territorialised in everyday spaces.²⁶⁶ Using ethnographic evidence based on communal relations, she demonstrates how the LOC comes to demarcate love lives in Leh. Smith’s primary contribution lies in suggesting that ‘borders past, present, and potential are remembered through embodied and built practices, even at a distance from the border-line.’²⁶⁷ Smith shifts the location of the border to intimate spaces, and her work is significant for exploring the relationship between material and ideational borders in and through spaces of intimacy. Smith’s work opens questions for this thesis to ask how and where are border sensibilities

²⁶¹ Sara Smith H, ‘In the Past, We Ate from One Plate’: Memory and the Border in Leh, Ladakh,’ *Political Geography* 35 (2013): 47–59. 49

²⁶² Ibid. 50.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid. 58

²⁶⁵ Ibid. 50.

²⁶⁶ Ibid. 58

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

felt? Does this occur in other intimate spaces that are geographically distant from the border unlike Leh?

Conclusions, Questions, Origins

To summarise, the concept of the border appears in flux and evolving. The transformation of the border renders it mobile, dynamic, embodied, technological and practiced. As this chapter has demonstrated, these changes in location, practice, and actors are not seamless, and consequently they raise several questions. Indeed, these changes are equally important in advancing how we study borders. ‘As border studies have become more interdisciplinary, other borders have been mapped onto the global mosaic of state borders: for example, the borders or boundaries which distinguish neighbourhoods, localities, cities, regions, macroregional blocs, nations, ethnic, religious, cultural, and even civilisational groupings.’²⁶⁸ The shifting contours of global borders, to take in neighbourhoods, localities, cities and so on, create fascinating prospects for border studies. These changes widen the horizons of contemporary border studies to take in myriad practices, locations, and actors. At the same time, these epistemological changes do not replace the original meaning of borders. Hence, border studies must approach the changing border by critically and reflexively assessing the extent of these changes, by asking questions like, *how* are these borders shifting, for whom, and in what ways? Are these shifts the result of changes in security practices, with the changing locations of the state’s security practices resulting in a shift of the border? Perhaps, yes. But let us not end our questioning there but begin from there. *How else* does or can the border shift? In the case of territorially stubborn, cartographically anxious postcolonial India, *can* the border shift? If so, *how*?

The literature on postcolonial borders in South Asia is particularly instructive for addressing the absence of history in critical border studies literature and underlining the relevance and persistence of borders that are intimately linked to notions of identity and

²⁶⁸ O’Dowd, “From a ‘Borderless World’ to a ‘World of Borders’: ‘Bringing History Back In.’” 1034

territory. Moreover, it is equally important not to view these questions or literatures as mutually exclusive. We should also circumvent border binaries- even when approaching the literature- between traditional/contemporary, mobile/fixed, Western/non-Western. At the same time, this thesis does not suggest the application of border studies to the case of South Asia. On the contrary, it suggests challenging both border studies and studies of borders in postcolonial South Asia to focus on the multiplicity, ambivalence, and changing nature of borders. Hence, this chapter does not conclude by selecting one articulation or idea of the border, nor by drawing on one outlook. Instead, this thesis considers borders as fixed *and* mobile, territorial *and* practiced, embodied, material, militarised and ideational. Bauder articulates this in terms of the task for critical geography but his words have relevance to this study too. He notes, ‘first, it must continue to affirm the impossibility of fixing the meaning of the border. The various aspects of the border represent meanings and material practices that cannot be unified in a stable and coherent concept. Second, by recognizing the incompleteness and instability of the border concept and its aspects, we can actively and creatively engage with the imagination of the border.’²⁶⁹ In other words, ‘the polysemy of the border provides the opportunity to articulate previously unrecognized aspects as interventions in the border dialectic.’²⁷⁰

This critical overview has sought to offer both a sense of the breadth and depth of the border, and highlight the issues that remain to be addressed. Methodologically, the focus on practice also suggests a sociological line of enquiry and an attention to ‘the everyday.’ The everyday can be thought of as a site of investigation but also as a tool of framing. Despite this focus on sociological lines of enquiry, the majority of the critical border studies literature is conceptually fixated. The injunction to examine the border from a phenomenological perspective has yet to be properly taken up. Most literature tends to be conceptually rich and empirically slim, whereby empirical evidence is used to confirm the theoretical lens rather than to study the border on its own terms. Despite the focus on

²⁶⁹ Bauder, “Toward a Critical Geography of the Border: Engaging the Dialectic of Practice and Meaning,” 1132

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

bordering practices and the methodological tilt towards ethnographic sensibilities, few scholars of critical border studies conduct fieldwork or theorise from the field. Simultaneously, most anthropological scholars with ethnographic outlooks, barring Piliavsky and Smith, limit their study of the border to the location of the border and borderland. However, if we take the richness of ethnographic approaches and tie them to ideas of borders from the field of both old and new border studies, a complex and nuanced idea of borders could emerge.

The focus on bordering in critical border studies is dominated by security practices. This dominance of security inevitably reproduces the centrality of the state that critical border studies seeks to counter. This could be moderated by shifting the focus from security and sovereignty to the absent but vital question of identity. Furthermore, a new focus on social and cultural practices rather than just security practices could expose the messy, complex, and contradictory ways that borders work through new actors and locations. Although bordering practices broaden our conceptual horizons for identifying and studying borders, it is still critical to note that bordering does not replace the border. Bordering practices would not be possible without the border nor territorial ideas about it. Furthermore, it would be naïve to assume that territorial borders themselves are devoid of bordering practices. Lastly, despite all the changes, sophisticated technologies, and even post-structural conceptualisations of the border, in the words of van Houtum, ‘the border exists.’²⁷¹

Finally, as this chapter demonstrates, there is no dearth of conceptually or empirically rich border studies. In this thesis, we do not need to redefine, rethink or reconceptualise the border. Instead by approaching the border through its three dimensions: epistemology, ontology, and phenomenology; we can negotiate the multiplicity of borders and consider the interplay between its epistemological, ontological and phenomenological nature. Parker and Vaughan-Williams in their *Lines in the Sand* Agenda, argue against ‘the epistemological seduction and sidestep the charm of the fixed border to draw out the layers

²⁷¹ Henk van Houtum, “Remapping Borders,” in *A Companion to Border Studies*, ed. Hastings Donnan and Thomas M. Wilson (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 405–18.

of ‘undecidability, indistinction and indeterminacy’ of borders.’²⁷² Contrary to their focus on ‘undecidability, indistinction, and indeterminacy,’ I would argue that in place of muddying the conceptual specificity of the border, it is necessary to ask the question of what makes the border identifiable across locations? That said, Parker and Vaughan-Williams also ask whether it is possible to theorise borders as experiences – a rich tradition of empirical casework on particular sites has not so far been cashed out in a theorisation of the phenomenological dimension of border studies.²⁷³ Challenging these notions, and approaching the border through its three dimensions, the following chapter considers whether an approach to border as method can answer questions about what do borders do and what makes borders mobile and fixed? It builds on these ideas of shifting borders to trace how and where borders travel. This also means examining the border on its own terms, without confining it to a conceptual and theoretical lens, but tracing it as a method and an object, while remaining reflexive and critically open to its possibilities.

²⁷² Parker and Vaughan-Williams, “Lines in the Sand? Towards an Agenda for Critical Border Studies.” 584

²⁷³ Ibid.

Chapter Two: Border as Method: Sensitivity Imagination, Stranger

Revisiting the problem

This chapter reaffirms that the border does not require redefinition nor reconceptualisation. This thesis confronts a different problem. On the one hand, the field of critical border studies seems fatigued. The desire to escape ‘the epistemological seduction of borders’, and instead draw out the layers of their ‘undecidability, indistinction and indeterminacy’ risks obscuring what a border actually is.²⁷⁴ In many ways, the considerable ambiguity surrounding the concept of the border has rendered it too elastic and opaque. Moreover, the abstraction of conceptual discussions of the border fails to adequately encapsulate the complex realities on the ground. The multiplicity of realities and definitions of borders means that we are grappling with a concept that contrary to its function, seems boundless.

The starting premise then for studying borders is complex and challenging. Borders, or as Chiara Brambilla prefers, ‘borderscapes’, are mobile, perspectival and relational; they are social processes, practices, discourses, knowledge, narratives, symbols, institutions, and even lines.²⁷⁵ Borders range from their traditional form as walls and barbed wire fences, to their newer, more dispersed avatars at airports, train stations, in virtual space, visa regimes, universities, bodies, the Mediterranean, and detention centres. The border, its locations and definitions have become plethoric; the porosity of the concept has led to its distortion and abstraction to the point of compromising meaning and specificity. Without trying to confine, nor seek fundamental definitions, it is still germane to acknowledge that the conceptual and epistemological malleability of the border poses significant problems. Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary and Frédéric Giraut refer to this as the ‘epistemological breakdown’ of the definition of the border.²⁷⁶ They ask ‘if the border is potentially

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Brambilla, “Exploring the Critical Potential of the Borderscapes Concept.”

²⁷⁶ Szary and Giraut, *Borderities and the Politics of Contemporary Mobile Borders*. 6.

everywhere, due to dissemination of its functions, what remains of the borderline? And can this border that is everywhere still be considered a border?’²⁷⁷

Further still, the focus on the securitisation of borders through surveillance and governmentality indicates how borders move through securitised practices of the sovereign, or in the case of Chris Rumford, through the borderwork of ordinary citizens. However, this attempt expands the concept only to include economic practices alongside security practices.²⁷⁸ Corey Johnson and Mark Salter seemingly admit to the trite and sanitised understandings implicit in such studies of the border as they claim ‘contemporary border work is technocratic, bureaucratic and political – anything but romantic.’²⁷⁹ As a result, current border studies appear limited to the security and economic functions of borders and have not broadened horizons to include newer actors, innovative practices, and more locations to elucidate how and where ideas of borders may travel. Border scholars are concerned by ‘the real disjuncture between the increasing complexity and differentiation of borders in global politics on the one hand, yet the apparent simplicity and lack of imaginations with which borders and bordering practices continue to be treated on the other.’²⁸⁰ The dominant emphasis on the changing nature of borders has led to a simple yet crucial oversight. Setting aside the focus on the changing nature of borders momentarily, counter-intuitively I would argue that it is equally vital to ask what has *not* changed about borders in the contemporary context? Furthermore, if Rumford proposes a ‘double gaze’ that is simultaneously directed at the changing role of borders in the globalised world, and the theorisation of the varying relations between borders and society, I would propose a

²⁷⁷ Ibid. 4.

²⁷⁸ Rumford, *Cosmopolitan Borders*.

²⁷⁹ Jones and Johnson, *Placing the Border in Everyday Life*. 3.

²⁸⁰ Vaughan-Williams, *Border Politics: The Limits of Sovereign Power*. 7

‘triple gaze.’ In other words, I would include the third dimension of borders i.e. the phenomenological dimension: the border as a site of investigation that Rumford omits.²⁸¹

Adding to this conundrum, the anthropology of borders literature in South Asia studies, though empirically attentive to the complexities of the border on the ground, and critical of methodological nationalism, fails to analytically develop the border beyond its conventional location and definition. This conventionality leaves little scope for originality while also perpetuating stagnant binaries of inside/outside. While there is little doubt that the broad field of border studies is both conceptually and empirically abundant, substantive understandings of the intricacies and contradictions of *how* borders travel and *where* they travel remain limited.²⁸² As a result, the problem this thesis identifies is located between the perils of abstraction without much substantive explication on the one hand, and lack of innovation on the other. How then does one address the abstract nature of borders while also considering their concrete manifestations? How does one overcome this conundrum without compromising the importance of either abstraction, conceptualisation, substantive engagement, or depth? Moreover, when considering borders holistically, through an understanding of their three dimensions, i.e. their epistemic, ontological, and phenomenological locations, there remains an absence of substantive insight into the workings of the border as a lived everyday experience through the lens of identity.²⁸³

These issues and oversights inform the central questions that guide and shape this thesis. Principally, this thesis poses the following questions: i) How do borders work in postcolonial South Asia? ii) What happens to ‘the border’ the further one moves away its original location? And finally, iii) What is the relationship between ideational and material borders? To address these questions while also tackling the limitations of the literature, this chapter proposes and develops the border as method approach. The argument for border as

²⁸¹ Rumford, “Theorising Borders.”

²⁸² Johnson et al., “Interventions on Rethinking ‘the Border’ in Border Studies.”

²⁸³ A notable exception however, is the work of geographer Anssi Paasi who studies the relationship between borders, boundaries, identity in depth. See Paasi, “Boundaries as Social Processes: Territoriality in the World of Flows.”

method is multi-layered but can initially be linked to challenge the methodological gap in a conceptually skewed critical border studies context, and simultaneously, to genuinely examine the border in the everyday, through a sociologically-influenced line of enquiry.²⁸⁴ This approach also centres on how a methodologically-led exploration of the border could reveal and contest the current literature's focus on security-centric practices by illuminating a broader range of bordering practices, locations, and actors that are currently absent from the literature. While border as method seemingly emphasises methodology, it also influences the conceptual orientation of this study.²⁸⁵ Challenging both the conceptual morass of the border studies field and the prosaic tendencies of South Asia studies, this chapter seeks to introduce the reader to how the thesis more widely understands the border.

This chapter proceeds in three steps. The first section introduces the framework of border as method as the foundation of this thesis. The second section develops the framework by presenting three components or conceptual devices to advance and animate the border as method framework. It is important to clarify that these components act as interpretive tools rather than explanatory tools. These components are sensitivity, imagination, and the stranger. The first component posits sensing the border and understanding borders through the lens of sensitivity. The second component stresses the work of the imagination as a key component in understanding the locations as well as the characteristics of borders. The last component is the figure of the stranger, which draws from sensitivity and imagination to study how the phantasm or figure of the stranger enlivens the border as method framework. The final section of the chapter discusses how the border as method approach shapes the methods of this thesis through the location of the three sites of b/ordering: the border, the city, and diaspora. Through a discussion on the three cases this section also presents an overview of the methods, positionality, and limitations of this thesis. Finally, while this chapter presents the conceptual scaffolding of the overall thesis, I also suggest that the

²⁸⁴ Noel Parker and Nick Vaughan-Williams, "Critical Border Studies: Broadening and Deepening the 'Lines in the Sand' Agenda," *Geopolitics* 17, no. 4 (2012): 727–33.

²⁸⁵ I understand 'methodology as the theory of method, or the approach or technique being taken, or the reasoning for selecting a set of methods.' Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Zed Books, 2012).

approach of border as method could offer a new approach to the study of borders. Moreover, the focus on the border as a starting point also has the potential to reveal often overlooked yet noteworthy aspects like the relationship between imagined and material borders.

The border as method

Border as method takes inspiration from Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson's innovative intervention titled *Border as Method*. In this work, they propose border as method in two ways: first, as a process of producing knowledge that holds open the tension between empirical research and the invention of concepts that orient it.²⁸⁶ It is vitally important to problematise this tension between the empirical and conceptual precisely because of the recent proliferation of conceptual tools in border studies. To some extent, one could also interpret border as method through Andrew Abbott's claim: 'to look for the 'things of boundaries' rather than the 'boundaries of things.'²⁸⁷ By this Abbott means that it is a mistake to look for boundaries between pre-existing social entities, instead we must start with boundaries and investigate how people create entities by linking those boundaries into units.²⁸⁸ Put simply, Abbott posits a realigned focus on the process rather than the object. Similarly, Maren Hofius suggests that concentrating on 'things of boundaries' yields the recognition of borders as boundaries that are neither 'absolute nor pure, but inherently relational and as a social practice of spatial differentiation.'²⁸⁹ The second way Mezzadra and Neilson suggest border as a method means 'to suspend, to recall a phenomenological

²⁸⁶ Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, or the Multiplication of Labor* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013).

²⁸⁷ Andrew Abbot, "Things of Boundaries," *Social Research* 62, no. 4 (1995): 857–82.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Maren Hofius, "Community at the Border or the Boundaries of Community? The Case of EU Field Diplomats," *Review of International Studies* 42, no. 5 (2016): 939–67. pp.947.

category, the set of disciplinary practices that present the objects of knowledge as already constituted and investigate instead the processes by which these objects are constituted.’²⁹⁰

The border as method approach also relies on questioning not just ‘the vision of the border as neutral line,’ but also the notion that ‘method is a set of pre-given, neutral techniques that can be applied to diverse objects without fundamentally altering the ways in which they are constructed and understood.’²⁹¹ In this way, both border and method are not fixed but are dynamic, co-constituted, and interrelated. Building on problematising both border and method, this thesis undertakes a close study that focuses on the processes, practices, and narratives that produce and reproduce the border and places emphasis on the methods to animate ideas of the border. Principally, by adapting Mezzadra and Nielson’s initial framework, this thesis interprets border as method as an orientation that focuses on *how* processes, practices, and narratives produce/reproduce and challenge ideas of the border. Furthermore, the border as method approach establishes the border as a starting point that guides and shapes the study of the border rather than a specific theoretical frame.

Border as method is incomplete, however, without a deeper awareness of the significance of method in forging this approach. For Mezzadra and Nielson the role of methods in studying the border is meaningful and goes beyond the performativity of method. For them, border as method is not about how the border is performed *per se*; they claim that the question of the border as method is more than methodological. They underline and accept ‘that methods tend to produce (often in contradictory and unexpected ways) the worlds they claim to describe.’²⁹² In other words, methods are not innocent tools because they also produce perspectives. Fundamentally, methods are above all ‘a question of politics, about the kinds of social worlds and subjectivities produced at the border and the ways that thought and knowledge can intervene in these processes of production.’²⁹³ Method then, for Mezzadra and Nielson, ‘is as much about acting on the world as it is about knowing it.

²⁹⁰ Mezzadra and Nielson, *Border as Method, or the Multiplication of Labor*. 15.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Ibid. 19.

²⁹³ Ibid.

More specifically, it is about the relations of action to knowledge in a situation where many different knowledge regimes and practices come into conflict.²⁹⁴ In other words, methods have political implications and directly influence the epistemological outcomes and characteristics of borders. Similarly, Claudia Aradau and Jef Huysmans have argued for recognising the politics of methods. Aradau and Huysmans suggest that methods ‘are not simply techniques of extracting information from reality and aligning it with — or against — bodies of knowledge. Methods are instead within worlds and partake in their shaping. As performative, methods are practices through which ‘truthful’ worlds are enacted, both in the sense of being acted upon and coming into being.’²⁹⁵ Moreover, this move implies ‘a reversal of the usual order of discussion that subsumes method and methodology to debates driven by the formulation of a problem-question, an ontology, an epistemology and a conceptual toolbox.’²⁹⁶

On the contrary, Aradau and Huysmans propose that the concept of method ‘does not treat methods as an outcome of a particular ontology and epistemology so that a particular method can only be used in relation to certain philosophical positions.’²⁹⁷ In its place, they encourage an understanding of methods that are ‘performative practices experimentally connecting and assembling fragments of ontology, epistemology, theories, techniques and data through which substantive effects are obtained.’²⁹⁸ The implication of this is that we should conceptualise methods as political rather than value neutral. Finally, they posit methods as ‘devices’ and ‘acts.’ Understood as devices, methods are seen to enact social and political worlds and understood as acts, they can become disruptive of social and political worlds.²⁹⁹ This dual reconceptualisation allows us to derive an understanding of *critical methods*.³⁰⁰ Thus, drawing from critical methods allows for the possibility of

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Claudia Aradau and Jef Huysmans, “Critical Methods in International Relations: The Politics of Techniques, Devices and Acts,” *European Journal of International Relations* 20, no. 3 (2014): 596–619.

²⁹⁶ Ibid. 598.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

considering the political implications and allows for thinking of methods as devices and acts. More notably, it emphasises the politics implicit in the choice of methods, and their ability to expose the subtle, problematic, and contradictory politics of the border that this thesis tries to grasp. Put simply, both the border and methods are dynamic processes, they are political, and act as valuable epistemological stances that directly influence outcomes. Further still, through a joint understanding of border and method, and the border as method, what emerges is a focus on processes, practices, and narratives that constitute borders and ideas of borders. This border as method approach means that the border itself is a starting point that leads and determines the process and pursuit of this study. In this approach, methods too are not pre-given but evolve through studying the border. Border as method means the border is the process and the method follows the process and/or ideas of the border.

To advance Mezzadra and Neilson's framework of border as method, and operationalise this approach for this study, it is germane to begin at the border. This suggests shifting the border from the realm of the abstract to the concrete. To engage with the border on its own terms is the first step to study the border as method. For this, it is crucial to resist the temptation to explain borders through pre-existing theoretical moulds like Agamben's state of exception or Foucault's governmentality and biopolitics.³⁰¹ In other words, to study the border on its own terms and employ border as method means to observe, conceptualise, and analyse *from* the border rather than bringing theoretical frames *to* the border. For instance, even though scholars like Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary and Frédéric Giraut criticise border studies for being trapped in 'the constraints of the tautological relationship between territory, state and borders'; their alternative, 'borderity', understood as technology of

³⁰¹ Amoore, Louise and Raley, Rita, Securing with Algorithms, Knowledge, Decision, Sovereignty, *Security Dialogue*. (2017) 48:3-10.

See Vaughan-Williams, *Europe's Border Crisis: Biopolitical Security and Beyond*.

Jones, *Border Walls: Security and the War on Terror in the United States, India and Israel*.

Hosna, "Abandoned Spaces and Bare Life in the Enclaves of the India-Bangladesh Border."

Amoore, L. The Line of Beauty: Security's objects and the form of data. *Theory, Culture and Society*. 2013. Vaughan-Williams, *Border Politics: The Limits of Sovereign Power*.

Salter, M, "When the exception becomes the rule: borders, sovereignty, and citizenship," *Citizenship Studies*, 12 (2008): 365-380

power, merely replaces the conceptual clasp of sovereignty with the reincarnation of power.³⁰² Meanwhile, this focus on sovereignty, or what Reece Jones and Corey Johnson call ‘sovereign bordering’, and power has produced unimaginative security-centric studies on borders.³⁰³ Instead of merely disparaging security-centric studies for its preoccupation with sovereignty and power, and its relegation of issues like identity and belonging, it is perhaps more meaningful to delve deeper into the relationship between methods and epistemology that the border as method approach accentuates. In this vein, retrieving the border is not just a tool for critiquing the limits of existing perspectives but also a way of questioning how we study the border. Further still, to apply border as method as an underlying approach also means to understand the border not just as a research object but rather ‘as an epistemological viewpoint that allows an acute critical analysis.’³⁰⁴

Put simply, border as method means to view the border as method, as processes, practices, narratives as well as a way of knowing. In addition to assuming the border as an epistemological stance, I also interpret border as method as a move to simplify and separate the border from its theorisations by returning to the border in its original location, both metaphorically and literally. That said, it would be naïve to suggest that it is possible to approach the border as a clean slate, without preconceptions; instead the point is to be led by the border, to use the border as the laboratory. More specifically, this approach suggests the need to be aware of the underlying questions, presumptions, and prior knowledge that invariably surface and guide the process.³⁰⁵ Nonetheless, this move to the traditional site is entwined with the aim of freeing the border from its theoretical confines. This return to the border implies realigning the focus from alternative imaginaries of the border to the border in its original and traditional location. To some extent, border as method suggests a return or recovery of sorts which suggests that rather than beginning with alternative imaginaries of the border, it is crucial to begin with its original, material manifestations. This also poses

³⁰² Szary and Giraut, *Borderities and the Politics of Contemporary Mobile Borders*. 2.

³⁰³ Jones and Johnson, *Placing the Border in Everyday Life*. 5.

³⁰⁴ Mezzadra and Neilson, *Border as Method, or the Multiplication of Labor*. 18.

³⁰⁵ Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow, *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes* (New York and Oxon: Routledge, 2012). 25.

the question of what has *not* changed about borders. Thus, to approach the border as method, this study begins with the border in its traditional location as a starting point from which to develop this thesis. This starting point is made apparent in the next chapter titled ‘The Border’ that starts at and focuses on the traditional location of borders by analysing the borders between India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan.

Mobilising border as method: Sensitivity, Imagination, and the Stranger

Sensitivity

To animate border as method as an approach, or in other words, follow the border/ideas of the border, I propose three conceptual tools, namely sensitivity, imagination, and the idea of the stranger. These tools provide guiding principles for interpreting and applying the border as method to this thesis. To develop the idea of sensitivity and a sense of borders, I look towards Jason Cons’ concept of sensitive space. For the second tool, imagination, I draw from Chiara Brambilla *et al*’s notion of borderscape and Arjun Appadurai’s concept of the work of the imagination. Finally, to illustrate the idea of the stranger I adopt Sara Ahmed’s conception of the stranger and Étienne Balibar’s notion of producing the stranger.

To begin with, the idea of sensitivity arises from refusing to choose a single understanding of the border. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this thesis works with characteristics of borders rather than a singular definition of the border. In this vein, this thesis considers borders as both fixed and mobile, physical and imagined, praxical and territorial/linear. More specifically, however, this thesis endeavours to examine the relationship between borders and identity, whereby borders are also viewed as division, difference, lived spaces, practices and narratives of inclusion and exclusion that produce and reproduce a *sense of borders*. To this end, the device of sensitivity originates from attempting to identify and further illuminate this sense of borders. For instance, Mireille Rosello and Stephen F. Wolfe suggest that ‘borders must have a sensible component in order to function as borders... a border that is not sensed by someone or something is not a border.’³⁰⁶ This means that

³⁰⁶ Schimanski and Wolfe, *Border Aesthetics: Concepts and Intersections*. 5.

borders contain within them a visceral, experiential sense of division or difference that characterises them and renders them identifiable. More so, Rosello and Wolfe explain sensing the border as something that ‘goes beyond the visual or even the five basic senses when they organize symbolic differences and separations between neighbourhood or communities, but also the limits between ‘safe’ and ‘dangerous’ areas or of a city, or ‘the difference’ between Finland and Russia.’³⁰⁷ Zeroing in on this sensory aspect of borders, we can see the relationship between material manifestations and the symbolic, or visceral experience of borders. This intangible but visceral aspect of borders helps us to see that what makes borders identifiable is something that exceeds theorisation or abstraction but is nonetheless something that can be palpably experienced, visualised, or sensed in multiple locations. It forces us to question ideas of difference more closely as well as to critically examine the characteristics of obvious demarcations like safe and dangerous.

At the same time, the focus on the sense of borders, or the visceral idea of borders does not obscure the materiality of borders as a lived violent reality.³⁰⁸ As Mezzadra and Neilson suggest, border as method ‘emerges from a continual confrontation with the materiality of the tensions and conflicts that constitute the border as an institution and set of social relations.’³⁰⁹ At the same time, this also underlines the importance of bringing the abstraction of the border into engagement with the materiality of the border. Having said that, rather than developing the study through theoretical concepts, a sense of border reprioritises the border and its characteristics as an epistemological stance, as a way of knowing or experiencing, and emphasises the way that ideas and experiences of difference, safety/danger, centres and peripheries make borders and border-like spaces intelligible. So, even though the focus is on the visceral or symbolic sense of borders, it is important to reaffirm that the symbolic not only produces and reproduces material divisions but also

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Mezzadra and Neilson, *Border as Method, or the Multiplication of Labor*. 18.

³⁰⁹ Ibid. 19.

renders them identifiable. In a way, the attention on the material and the symbolic brings an awareness of both rather than one.

Similarly, Jason Cons' *Sensitive Space*, which examines the enclaves on the border between India and Bangladesh, offers the analytical framework of sensitive space to explain the everyday manifestations and ramifications of postcolonial territorial anxiety. Cons not only highlights the symbolic dimensions of borders that declare borders as politically sensitive but also highlights the everyday practices that underpin the marginality and experiences of such politically sensitive border spaces. Moreover, Cons' use of sensitivity captures the intangible but real and lived sense of borders. At the same time, sensitivity 'is not so much a measurable condition, but a set of simultaneously mystifying and generative relationships between nation and national territory.'³¹⁰ Cons explains 'sensitive' spaces as spaces where we can see 'critical disjunctures between imagined and lived space; the accumulation of various anxieties about territory and belonging; and cycles of implementation and corrosion of projects seeking to bring such zones "in line" with maps, visions, and politicised notions of space.'³¹¹ Through his work, Cons encourages a drawing of connections not just between margins and centers, but also between margins and margins.³¹²

This critical disjuncture between lived and imagined spaces, or the relationship between margins and margins, is particularly valuable. It fosters the drawing of connections between spaces of marginality rather than borders *per se* and elucidates the possibility of exploring border-like spaces. Moreover, Cons provides clues and characteristics that can drive the search for sensitive spaces. The open-ended question of whether all borders are sensitive or whether sensitive spaces are all borders enables us to ask further questions on the relationship between margins and marginality. To better explore this, Cons links sensitive space to the production of territory, i.e. to the ways in which territory is made and remade

³¹⁰ Cons, *Sensitive Space: Fragmented Territory at the India-Bangladesh Border*. 148.

³¹¹ Ibid. 154.

³¹² Ibid.

as sensitive. He suggests the idea that territory itself is elastic,³¹³ explaining it thus: ‘not necessarily as the expansion and contraction of physical space or its abstract representation on the map’ but rather, ‘a description of the way particular territorial conjunctures produce varied landscapes expressing competing and often-confused values.’³¹⁴ In other words, he suggests that ideas of territory and the sensitivity associated with them can be mobile and stretched. This poses the question that if territories are elastic in this way, how and where do territories move and what are the borders of such territories?

Using sensitive space as an optic charts ‘not a general theory of social change but rather a heuristic approach to the constitution of margins and centers, the articulation between broad and micro projects of territory-making, and the relationships between political and (politicized) imaginations of “out of the way places” and life in them.’³¹⁵ Cons asks how sensitive spaces are embodied and, consequently, clarify deep-seated anxieties about territory, about their meanings and about various forms of identity and belonging.³¹⁶ To properly consider the provocations of dis-locations and the processual nature of borders, Cons’ analytical tool kit of sensitive space, elastic territory, and the disjunctures between imagined and lived spaces yields productive avenues to capture manifestations of territoriality and borders. Additionally, the fact that sensitivity encourages us to draw out the relationship between ‘margins and margins’ rather than margins and centres is novel because it unlocks the potential of exploring newer spaces, locations, and ideas of territories where borders or border-like spaces can be found.³¹⁷ Furthermore, this analytical lens is valuable as this thesis does not necessarily undertake a comparative study on borders in their conventional definitions, but is instead led by a ‘sense of borders’ that can expose relations between margins and margins through identifiable notions of alterity. This further cultivates and develops the border as method approach. Moreover, this thesis suggests a

³¹³ For a discussion on the elasticity of territory and the mobility of techniques for control in the context of Occupied Territories see Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel’s Architecture of Occupation* (London and New York: Verso, 2007).

³¹⁴ Cons, *Sensitive Space: Fragmented Territory at the India-Bangladesh Border*. 154

³¹⁵ Ibid. 155.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

move to ‘sense’ the border, without necessarily prescribing a conceptual or theoretical lens but rather following the border itself. This sense of being guided means that the border is not just as an object, a material and/or ideational practice, but rather that it is also a sensitive and sensory experience that can be projected onto more spaces than simply the boundary between two states.

Imagination

To understand the second device to mobilise border as method, imagination, I turn to Chiara Brambilla, Jussi Laine, James W. Scott and Gianluca Bocchi and their edited volume *Borderscaping: Imaginations and Practices of Border Making*. Attentive to social and cultural questions and border issues, Brambilla *et al* consider the ‘multilevel complexity of borders – from the geopolitical to the level of social practices and cultural productions at and across the border at different levels and, thus, not only along the dividing lines of nation-state sovereignties.’³¹⁸ They suggest that the shift from borders to bordering and the theorisation of borders as social processes has connected wider concerns about territory, identity, sovereignty, and citizenship within political geography.³¹⁹ Responding to critical border studies, they offer borderscapes as an alternative border imaginary ‘beyond the line.’ Using borderscapes ‘develops a wider understanding of the contemporary spatiality of politics, providing a political insight into critical border studies based on a *multisited approach* at different levels.’³²⁰ This approach should be welcomed for its inclusive understanding of borders in space, while also elucidating the multiplicity of social spaces where borders are negotiated by different actors.³²¹ Interestingly, it has encouraged studies of borders as multidimensional entities that are constituted in different symbolic and material forms and functions that also include socio-political and cultural practices.³²²

³¹⁸ Chiara Brambilla et al., “Introduction: Thinking, Mapping, Acting and Living Borders under Contemporary Globalisation,” in *Borderscaping: Imaginations and Practices of Border Making*, ed. Chiara Brambilla et al. (England & USA: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015). 1

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid. 2

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ibid.

Furthermore, the relational approach proposed draws connections between interacting political visions and everyday socio-cultural practices or social representations. The concept of borderscapes is also constructive because it considers the ‘dialogic nature of bordering processes *and imaginaries* and the tension between institutional and formal modes of political agency and social non-formal modes of agency that inhabit the borderscape.’³²³

Yet, while accepting the analytical value of borderscapes, particularly their capacity to capture the notion of border imaginaries through adopting a relational and dialogic approach that includes social and cultural practices, I am nevertheless hesitant to adopt the language and terminology of borderscapes. This is because of divergent understandings of imagined borders. Put differently, this thesis strives to explore, and use imagination and borders in terms of demonstrating how borders reside in and travel to cognitive and ideational domains rather than to focus on images or aesthetics of the borders themselves. Even though Brambilla *et al* argue that the ‘significance of borderscapes goes beyond mere aesthetic images and the polysemicity of the concept has important (geo)political implications that also help to clarify the relationship of borderscapes to the social imaginary.’³²⁴ It is still crucial to state that the point of digression between borderscapes and this study lies in the aim of *connecting border experiences with border representations* by rethinking borders through the *relationship between politics and aesthetics*, in which borderscapes arise.’³²⁵ Conversely, rather than the relationship between politics and aesthetics, this thesis is primarily concerned with understanding the relationship between border politics and ideas of borders that are lived, practiced, and imagined. The term ‘borderscape’ conveys a certain image of the border that this thesis is reluctant to adopt particularly because of its aestheticising potential. It would be disingenuous to propose a move to retrieve the border and subsequently replace it with ‘a scape.’³²⁶ The imagery of

³²³ Ibid. 3.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Ibid. 3.

³²⁶ The suffix ‘-scape’ derives from an old Germanic verb meaning ‘to create.’ In many ways then using or adding the term scape to the border inadvertently *creates* an image that I seek to avoid. See Chiara Brambilla and Holger Pötzsch, “In/visibility,” in *Border Aesthetics: Concepts and*

the borderscape could still interfere with grasping the border on its own terms. Therefore, we can draw from the vitality of the borderscapes' relational and dialogic approach while refraining from adopting its language and preoccupations.

This study acquires and applies the idea of imagination or ideational borders that Arjun Appadurai defines as the 'work of imagination.'³²⁷ Appadurai argues that the role of imagination is no longer limited to the 'special expressive space of art, myth, and ritual' but has now 'become a part of the quotidian mental work of ordinary people in many societies.'³²⁸ In other words, 'it has entered the logic of ordinary life from which it had largely been successfully sequestered.'³²⁹ Underlining the relationship between 'the image, the imagined, and the imaginary', Appadurai encourages us to view *imagination as a social practice* that can direct us to something critical and new.³³⁰ Appadurai cites the example of migrants and refugees, who 'move and must drag their imagination for new ways of living along with them.'³³¹ What is noteworthy in Appadurai's explanation is the idea that 'diaspora bring the force of the imagination, as both memory and desire.'³³² Likewise, this thesis is also interested in discovering the 'force of the imagination' in terms of the physical and imagined spatialities and borders that the work of the imagination produces and reproduces through social practice. In this vein, imagination can be viewed as 'an organised field of social practices, a form of work, and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility.'³³³ Furthermore, it is through the 'work of the imagination' that the everyday lives of ordinary people collectively create the

Intersections, ed. Johan Schimanski and Stephen E. Wolfe (New York and Oxford: Beghahn Publishers, 2017).

³²⁷ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). 5.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Ibid. 31.

³³¹ Ibid. 6.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Ibid.

ideas of neighbourhoods, nations, belonging, and borders that this thesis seeks to better comprehend.³³⁴

To illustrate further, I draw from Lene M. Johannessen and Ruben Moi who underline a difference between what they refer to as ‘representations of borders and the representations of concrete man-made borders.’³³⁵ In explaining the significance of imagination in their work, Johannessen and Moi outline a dialectic that is worth considering. They state that their pursuit is based on ‘the contours of the kind of pre-figurations and the pre-conditions that enable the creation of material borders in the first place, since without these more intangible, ideological movements a fence is simply that, a fence.’³³⁶ Although Johannessen and Moi’s engagement with pre-figurations suggests a causal relationship, what I am more interested in is studying the process that transforms a fence into the border. In other words, what are the pre-figurations or mental workings that transform a fence into a border? To what extent is this the ‘work of the imagination?’

On a similar note, Henk van Houtum argues that ‘there are no uni-versal borders, nor is there a one-and-only original border, there is no pre-border. The reality of the border is created by the meaning that is attached to it.’³³⁷ He adds ‘a line is geometry, a border is interpretation. A gate may be a threshold for some, and a passage for others. And a wall may be a “protection” against the imagined pernicious influence of others behind the wall for some and to others mostly a place to spray graffiti. A border can be drawn spatially everywhere. It is the symbolic meaning attributed to the appearance of the line which must

³³⁴ Ibid. 5.

³³⁵ Lene M. Johannessen and Ruben Moi, “Imaginary,” in *Border Aesthetics: Concepts and Intersections*, ed. Johan Schimanki and Stephen F Wolfe (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Publishers, 2017), 51–67. 50.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ van Houtum, “Remapping Borders.”

Also see Henk van Houtum, “Internationalisation and Mental Borders,” *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie (Journal of Economic and Social Geography)* 90, no. 3 (1999): 329–35.

Henk van Houtum and Anke Strüver, “Borders, Strangers, Doors and Bridges,” *Space and Polity* 6, no. 2 (2002): 141–146.

be seen as constructor of the normative form. *A border is made real through imagination* (emphasis added).³³⁸ Interestingly, van Houtum highlights the relationship between the symbolic meaning of borders, their interpretations and the work of the imagination in making borders real. At the same time, it leads to the question of *how* does imagination make borders real? In what ways does the imagination gain meaning to make borders real? Furthermore, van Houtum associates a certain ‘masking of reality’ inherent in the visual representation of borders as lines on maps and the imagined threat of those who “invade” the imagined unity of “us”.³³⁹ This idea of invasion is particularly noteworthy as it also relates to the third component of the border as method approach, the idea of the stranger. This idea too could be seen to relate to the work of the imagination, but before delving into the last component, it is fundamental to recognise the role of imagination, as a space but also as a meaning-giving device that is projected or produced through social practices. Viewed in conjunction with sensitivity, the imagination is a key practice through which the border is formed.

The figure of the stranger

The third component that I use to develop border as method in this thesis draws on Sara Ahmed’s *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. Here, Ahmed develops the notion of strange encounters and the figure of the stranger. Ahmed claims that ‘what is at stake in the *ambivalence* of such relationships between human and aliens is not whether aliens are represented as good or bad, or as ‘beyond’ or ‘within’ the human, but how they function to establish and define the boundaries of which ‘we’ are in their proximity, in the very intimacy of the relationship between (alien) slime and (human) skin.’³⁴⁰ This idea of defining boundaries establishes ‘how the alien as a category within a given community of citizens takes on a spatial function and establishes relations of proximity and distance within the home (land).’³⁴¹ Ahmed uses the notion of aliens to

³³⁸ van Houtum, “Remapping Borders.” 412.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2000). 2.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

illustrate how they can demarcate spaces of belonging: ‘by coming too close to home, they establish the very necessity of policing the borders of knowable and inhabitable terrains.’³⁴² She explains that the techniques for differentiating between citizens and aliens, as well as between humans and aliens, allows the ‘familiar to be established as the familial.’³⁴³ This draws attention to both the imagined and material boundaries of the familial. Drawing a distinction between alien and stranger, Ahmed claims that the ‘figure of the ‘stranger’ is produced, not as that which we fail to recognise, but as that which we have already recognised as ‘a stranger.’³⁴⁴ She adds, ‘in the gesture of recognising the one that we do not know, the one that is different from ‘us’, we flesh out the beyond, and give it a face and form.’³⁴⁵ This embodied otherness is reflective of how borders travel through the figure of the Other, who is not necessarily an alien but a stranger. The salient difference between the alien and the figure of the stranger is this precise sense of familiarity. What is particularly instructive in Ahmed’s notion of the stranger, however, is that it provides ‘a mechanism *for allowing us to face that which we have already designated as the beyond.*’³⁴⁶ More so, through what Ahmed refers to as the ‘fetishization of the stranger’, she highlights contrary to a figure *per se*, we need to understand how the stranger is an ‘effect of processes of inclusion and exclusion, or incorporation and expulsion, that constitute the boundaries of bodies and communities, including communities of living (dwelling and travel), as well as epistemic communities.’³⁴⁷ It is important to take into account this conjunction between the figure/phiasm of the stranger and boundary producing processes of inclusion and exclusion in order to trace ideas of the border.

Ahmed’s concept of the stranger is constructive because it draws attention to the stranger, whether real or phantasmal, and most importantly to the idea of those ‘who are in their very proximity, *already recognised as not belonging*, as being ‘out of place.’’³⁴⁸ Principally, this

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Ibid. 3.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Ibid. 6.

³⁴⁸ Ibid. 21.

recognition of ‘those who are out of place’ allows both the demarcation and enforcement of the boundaries of ‘this place’, as where ‘we’ dwell.³⁴⁹ In this respect, what I draw from Ahmed is, first, the process of recognition: a focus on what it is that makes strangers identifiable. Second, this idea of belonging in relation to the stranger and the subsequent demarcation of space, whether real or imagined, is acutely effective when trying to grasp and operationalise the border as method. Furthermore, it elucidates the relationship between embodied otherness, borders/boundaries, and imagined differences.³⁵⁰ On a related note, Balibar locates these ‘questions of the stranger within a philosophical horizon that questions the relationship between the construction of the stranger (or the reproduction of strangeness) and the status of the “citizen.”’³⁵¹ Balibar stresses that ‘each society produces its own kind of strangers, not only a phenomenological or sociological one, but more importantly, a political one, which opens the doors to antagonistic choices.’³⁵² This begs the question: how does focusing on the figure of the stranger reveal the border politics and boundaries of a society? It highlights that the stranger is not natural, but needs to be produced and reproduced. The production of the stranger or strangeness suggests that the stranger is not stable, but something unstable and mobile.³⁵³ The production of the stranger as a stranger is a process which takes place in everyday life through myriad social practices and legal rules.³⁵⁴

The stranger is produced in multiple sites through processes, narratives, and practices that make visible and re/produce a border or boundary. Therefore ‘the stranger’ can keep shifting: it is a category that gains meaning from context. In a sense, we can produce the stranger or project strangeness onto different others – historically, politically, and in mundane ways. The stranger and the projection of borders through the boundary of proximity and distance also implies a paradoxical degree of fixity and mobility. This is

³⁴⁹ Ibid. 21-2.

³⁵⁰ Also See van Houtum and van Naerssen, “Bordering, Ordering, Othering.”

³⁵¹ Étienne Balibar, “Strangers as Enemies: Further Reflections on the Apories of Transnational Citizenship,” *Globalization Working Papers*, vol. 06/4, 2006. 3.

³⁵² Ibid. 4.

³⁵³ Ibid. 5.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

paradoxical because fixity can be maintained in terms of who the stranger may be, which does not limit mobility in terms of where s/he may go. Hence, following the stranger or the figure of the stranger, demarcations and embodiments of otherness are valuable tropes that mobilise the border as method framework. Through the stranger, the border and ideas of the border can be followed.

The question that emerges from this is how to identify the stranger. And how does one search for the stranger? To answer the first question - identifying the stranger - Ahmed claims that when 'we seek to recognise who they are, by reading the signs on their body, or by reading their body *as* a sign, such acts of reading constitute 'the subject' in relation to 'the stranger', who is recognised as 'out of place' in a given place.'³⁵⁵ This notion of reading the signs or reading the body as a sign also helps elucidate symbolic borders that are present through quotidian practices. I would also add that to produce and identify the stranger one needs to know the stranger to constantly reproduce their strangeness. This reproduction of the stranger is represented in quotidian habits, practices, symbols, bodies and where narratives of the other emerge that b/other and border the microcosm.

For the second question, I extrapolate from what Balibar refers to as 'petty racism' to suggest the idea of 'petty bordering' that contributes to the processes of producing and reproducing the stranger. I propose that what Balibar refers to as petty racism, understood as every day, mundane forms of exclusion, could be expanded to include 'petty bordering' involving other identity categories like race, ethnicity, religion, and gender. Every society finds its stranger to target and stigmatise. This analytical lens of the stranger provides a means not only to identify the stranger but also to critically examine the processes that erect and dismantle, produce and reinforce everyday borders. For instance, chapter four of this thesis analyses what Balibar- as well as Mezzadra and Neilson- refers to as the internal border. It does so through the (phantasmic) figure of the Bangladeshi immigrant and the second-class Muslim citizen in the city of Mumbai. The internal border that Balibar refers to could be interpreted as the split between the nation and its Other or stranger. Balibar

³⁵⁵ Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. 8.

suggests that it constitutes ‘those who occupy it as eternally *displaced (out of place)* persons, the internally excluded.’³⁵⁶ For Mezzadra and Neilson, when describing French *banlieues*, the internal border is between ‘the bourgeois city and the slum’ that for them reflects the border *within* citizenship.³⁵⁷ Their understanding addresses the intersections between the issues of class, race, and ethnicity. Furthermore, related to the border *within* citizenship is also the issue of post/coloniality and the postcolonial migration from former colonies to the metropole. Consequently, the third substantive case study of this thesis explores this aspect in depth through the example of Indian, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani diaspora in contemporary Britain. For this thesis, I combine Balibar’s and Mezzadra and Neilson’s conception of the internal border.

Finally, it is also important to understand the stranger as a category and recognise what Reece Jones refers to as the spatiality of the ‘categories are containers’ metaphor.³⁵⁸ In other words, it is through the ‘categories are containers’ metaphor that one can further comprehend why ‘identity categories operate based on notions of inclusion and exclusion and why they are effectively territorialised.’³⁵⁹ Jones claims that every category has a definite inside, outside, and boundary that sharply differentiate it from other categories around it.³⁶⁰ At the same time, Jones contends that it is important to acknowledge the way the boundaries around the categories are cognitively understood as closed and fixed even when we know that they are open and fluid.³⁶¹ In other words, as useful as the figure of the stranger is in terms of identifying and exposing the workings of material and ideational

³⁵⁶ Etienne Balibar, “Uprisings in the Banlieues,” *Constellations* 1, no. 14 (2007): 47–71.

³⁵⁷ Mezzadra and Neilson, *Border as Method, or the Multiplication of Labor*. 151.

³⁵⁸ Reece Jones, “The Spatiality of Boundaries,” *Progress in Human Geography* *Progress in Human Geography* 34, no. 2 (2010): 263–67.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 266.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁶¹ Reece Jones, “Categories, Borders and Boundaries,” *Progress in Human Geography* 33, no. 2 (2009): 174–89.

borders, it is equally important to challenge and question the notion of categories and the essentialising boundaries they forge.

Translating Methodology to Methods

This final section addresses the question of how the conceptual tools of sensitivity, imagination, and the stranger directly influence the methods of this thesis. To tackle this question, one ought to return to the initial premise of border as method. Approaching the border as method, as narratives, processes, and practices, necessitates two things. First, reflexivity, and second, what I refer to as a critically open stance. The use of stance is deliberate, as it conveys a form grounding or positioning that is not rigid but remains critical *and* open to the process of border as method. Reflexivity does not just mean a reflection on one's social position, but rather a reflexive process that adopts a dialogic approach to research as well as allowing findings to shape questions. Farhana Sultana suggests that 'a reflexive research process can open up the research to more complex and nuanced understandings of issues, where boundaries between process and content can get blurred.'³⁶² Furthermore, 'it is only through being reflexive that we explode our fantasies about ethnographic texts being copies of reality, we also deflate any fantasies we hold about absolute truth and objectivity.'³⁶³ To mitigate as well as embrace the blurring of boundaries, particularly when the border *is* method, it is doubly important to not only remain reflexive but also to remain critical and open. The embrace of border as method also necessitates a fine balance between accepting the possibility of being led by the border on the one hand, and on the other, critically, reflexively, and rigorously questioning the border as method in conjunction with ideas, concepts, the literature, and the field. Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi for instance, explicates the difference between asserting reflexivity theoretically and practically. He notes that 'reflexivity is not achieved by abstractly invoking theories that critique the metaphysics of presence, the discursive production of scientific objects, the

³⁶² Farhana Sultana, "Reflexivity, Positionality and Participatory Ethics: Negotiating Fieldwork Dilemmas in International Research," *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 6, no. 3 (2007): 374–85.

³⁶³ Douglas E. Foley, "Critical Ethnography: The Reflexive Turn," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 15, no. 4 (2002): 469–90.

nexus of knowledge and power, or any other assertions, as profound and legitimate as they may be. Foregrounding them risks drowning reflexivity in mere academic posture.³⁶⁴ In that sense, it is important to go beyond academic posturing, and understand reflexivity more practically, as ‘providing a description for which one must assume responsibility’ but more crucially as something that is dynamic and developing with one’s work.³⁶⁵ Ghassem-Fachandi believes that ‘reflexivity is thus a relation that occurs between an author, a reader, and a text, not reducible to declarations of intent in an intro.’³⁶⁶ Thinking about the process of research and developing the border as method in these ways is useful for continually sharpening one’s own questions, assumptions, and arguments throughout the process of research.

The result of the border as method approach is mirrored in the three cases or locations that this thesis critically examines. The locations or cases of the border, the city, and diaspora were not predetermined but developed through a reflexive and interpretive approach that considered border as method.³⁶⁷ Put simply, the border led to the subsequent case of the city, which also led to exploring the border in the context of diaspora. However, for this research to take shape, it was vital to remain critically open towards the border and the methods it necessitated. In many ways, border as method developed at the intersection of the three dimensions of borders: between the literature (epistemological), the political (ontological), and the field (phenomenological), but also through a constant and reflexive re/evaluation of the ideas and questions it provoked. True to this process of studying the border as method (that is: by questioning the taken-for granted nature of the border as an object) this project seeks to study the processes that enable and disable the border as practices, narratives, and lived experiences. In many ways, employing border as method practically means remaining open to the idea of the border itself, to finding the border in

³⁶⁴ Ghassem-Fachandi, *Pogrom in Gujarat: Hindu Nationalism and Anti-Muslim Violence in India*. 24

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Ibid. 24-5

³⁶⁷ For an understanding of interpretivist methods I rely on Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes*.

unexpected locations, or as Carol Cohn suggests ‘following the metaphor.’³⁶⁸ Considering the three dimensions of the border, while also drawing *from* the field, I have sought to simultaneously develop, substantiate, or question existing ideas of the border as well as the dominant strands of literature associated with each of the cases. In other words, I have sought to question the limits of the dominant narratives in border studies, South Asia border studies, urban studies on Muslims in Mumbai, and diaspora literature on South Asians in Britain.

In order to answer these questions, my research methods included semi-structured interviews, participant observations, as well as the use of secondary sources, historical evidence, and news sources. I sought to maintain a level of consistency in terms of the actors interviewed and the methods undertaken in each of these cases. To this end, I conducted semi-structured interviews with academics, politicians, NGOs, local political leaders or bodies as well as individuals like border guards and residents. However, I also relied on developing an ethnographic sensibility, which meant that I relied on myriad serendipitous encounters that snowballed into conversations that informed the project. In using the term ethnographic sensibility, I follow Edward Schatz who proposes ethnography as a ‘*sensibility* that goes beyond face-to-face contact’, whereby participant observation is only one of the methods that might be used and an overarching analysis of texts, cultural products, and so on ‘can also generate an ethnographic study by revealing the meanings people attribute to the world they inhabit.’³⁶⁹ Additionally, since the thesis seeks to explore spatialities and the imagination of borders, I relied on walking tours that presented a kind of mobile narrative for all three locations. At the border between India and Bangladesh it was only possible to walk along and patrol the border with the Border Security Force Officers. Between India and Pakistan, we patrolled the border from the confines of a bullet proof vehicle. For the subsequent two cases, Mumbai and the combined

³⁶⁸ Carol Cohn, “Motives and Methods: Using Multi-Sited Ethnography to Study US National Security Discourses,” in *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations*, ed. Brooke A. Ackerly, Maria Stern, and Jacqui True (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 91–108.

³⁶⁹ Edward Schatz, “Introduction: Ethnographic Immersion and the Study of Politics,” in *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power*, ed. Edward Schatz (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 1–22.

case of Birmingham and London, I participated in walking tours offered by locals to understand their perspective and their narratives about these spaces.

The multi-sited fieldwork also influenced the continual adaptation of methods. In the three locations: the border, the city, and the diaspora, my own positionality influenced how I was perceived and my access to people and spaces. As a result, this altered my approach. For instance, at the border, I was viewed as a female researcher scholar who was from abroad, despite my Indian citizenship. Here the location of my university dominated the discussion. For the case of Mumbai, which is also my home city, I deliberately chose to focus on my own neighbourhood for two reasons. First, to challenge its cosmopolitan image as well as the literature's focus on the obvious margins in the city. Second, to draw on my own familiarity to discuss 'sensitive' issues like religious views, the figure of the illegal Bangladeshi, and inter-faith marriages. The third case, diaspora, perhaps proved most challenging in terms of access and reinforced my own role of outsider in Indian diaspora, as I was viewed as someone 'from the motherland.' To remedy this, and gain insight into diasporic neighbourhoods, I relied on interviews conducted by community members to collate a local oral history project. The transcripts collected by the local community for this project enabled me to cross the borders of the community. In each of the subsequent chapters/locations, i.e. the border, city, and diaspora, I reflect more specifically challenges and issues that influence the methods and emerge out of the context.

Summary

To summarise the argument of this chapter, border as method forms the overarching interpretive framework that guides this thesis' study of the physical and imagined borders of South Asia. The implementation of border as method involves the study of the border on its own terms, by retrieving it from its conceptual confines and treating the border as a way of knowing. Consequently, this entails a focus on the border not just as a research object but as an epistemological stance. Furthermore, it implies that methods are not apolitical nor neutral but relate to the social worlds they create through what they investigate. To restate Huysmans and Aradau: 'starting with methods as devices and acts brings out the political stakes that methods carry and thus the struggles over the worlds that

methods enact.’³⁷⁰ In other words, adopting border *as* method means using the border as a starting point to guide and lead the analysis and method.

Building on this basic framework, I added three tools that animate border as method, namely, sensitivity, imagination, and the figure of the stranger. These three components are interwoven throughout the three locations and guide the substantive chapters. All three bring us closer to mobilising and grasping the border on its own terms, through *sense*, *imagination* and the *phantasm of the stranger*. Each component fulfils a role independently, and collectively. The idea of sensitivity advances the exploration of new spaces; the work of the imagination allows for the inclusion of new practices; and the phantasm/figure of the stranger widens the analysis to consider newer actors in border studies. Sensitivity and imagination help unearth new ideas of spaces/territories. The figure of the stranger, through narratives, practices, and embodied or imagined Others fosters the critical examination of material and ideational borders. These tools enable one to trace the border or be led by the border. These interpretive tools are guiding principles that allow me to trace or identify notions of the border in the substantive cases that follow and help tie together these seemingly disparate cases.

³⁷⁰ Aradau and Huysmans, “Critical Methods in International Relations: The Politics of Techniques, Devices and Acts.” 613.

Chapter Three: The Border

Of unexpected border-crossings

The rain drops were hitting the windscreen faster than the wipers could clean them off. The Indian monsoon was beating its drum in all its glory. It was August 2014, and it was the first time I visited a border for my fieldwork. The journey from Guwahati, the capital of Assam, to Dhubri in the west of the province, where India shares a border with Bangladesh, is a four-and-a-half-hour long drive. The quality of the road reflects the political neglect and isolation with which the northeast is associated.³⁷¹ Since taking a taxi to the border areas was unadvisable, the driver and the car were generously offered by an interlocutor I had met in Guwahati a few days before. The driver, Deepesh,³⁷² was from the neighbouring state of Bihar, but had lived in Assam for several years. Throughout the journey, he offered snippets of information while also half-heartedly enquiring about the purpose of my visit. Driving through Assam, I noticed that the trees lining both sides of the road had AASU painted on their trunks.³⁷³ As we neared Dhubri, the landscape began to change. The familiar paddy fields were replaced by the narrow muddy lanes of this border town filled

³⁷¹ Northeast of India comprises of seven states or Seven Sisters. They include Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Manipur, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, and Mizoram. The diverse population includes 75 major ethnic groups and sub-groups with 400 languages and dialects. The border between India and Bangladesh traverses through India's northeast. According to Archana Upadhyay, 'the fragile nature of the geographical and political connectivity of this region to mainland India the political and security challenges emanating from these remote frontiers, have proved to be intractable.' The northeast is a fragile borderland and was incorporated into independent India with difficulty. Unfortunately, the region remains economically and politically isolated as the Indian government has failed to properly address insurgency issues and secessionist tendencies. The use of the draconian law and Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in Nagaland, Assam, parts of Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur has criminalised the indigenous people and tribes of the region and led to human rights abuses.

See Preeti Gill, ed., *The Peripheral Centre Voices from India's Northeast* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2014).

See Archana Upadhyay, *India's Fragile Borderlands: The Dynamics of Terrorism in North East India* (New York and London: I.B. Tauris, 2009).

³⁷² Name changed

³⁷³ AASU is an abbreviation for All India Assam Student Union. They have historically protested the influx of illegal Bangladeshi in Assam. They consider Dhubri and Karimganj as hotspots.

with over-flowing fruit and vegetable stalls, and local shops. The car beeped incessantly as Deepesh tried to navigate between crowded people, rickshaws, stray dogs, and goats. Amidst all this, he unexpectedly announced, ‘*Yahan se sab Bangladesh shuru hota hain*’ (From here Bangladesh begins).³⁷⁴ For one moment, I was confused but also a little dismissive. We had crossed no border, no sign board, nor had we passed any physical demarcation; how, then, could we be in Bangladesh? Where was the ‘elaborate scaffolding, barbed wire, steel gates, and uniformed border guards, the highly-structured production of national difference?’³⁷⁵ Certain that this was not possible, still I asked, *kaise* (how)? Deepesh remarked, ‘*dekho na, yahaan sab Bangladeshi log hai, topi and aur lungi wale.*’³⁷⁶ (look around you, they are all Bangladeshi here, they are wearing skull caps and *lungis*). Even though we had not crossed *the* border, it seemed that we had crossed *a* border.

From the outset, it was evident that there was more to the border in its physical location than meets the eye. This unexpected border crossing disrupted conventional, preconceived images, ideas, and locations of the border. The identification of mundane, visible, and embodied religious signs of the alleged Bangladeshi Muslim destabilises the borderline, pulling it inward, from the borderline to the border town of Dhubri. More so, the work of the imagination contests the location and re/places the border where alleged Bangladeshis are identifiable. This unexpected border crossing draws attention to the complexities of borders in their traditional location and underlines the subtle workings of an imagined border that invites thorough exploration. This illustration uncovers the interplay between hidden boundary-making processes that sketch an in/visible demarcation between us and them. Reece Jones suggests that ‘the territorial component of a national identity is essential because it allows boundaries between the imagined nation and others outside the group to be spatially displayed rather than merely mentally constructed.’³⁷⁷ Interestingly, this

³⁷⁴ Fieldwork notes

³⁷⁵ Jisha Menon, *The Performance of Nationalism: India, Pakistan, and the Memory of Partition* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013). 44.

³⁷⁶ A lungi is a sarong like fabric that is wrapped around the waist and extends to the ankles. It is worn by men in India and Bangladesh

³⁷⁷ Reece Jones, “Whose Homeland? Territoriality and Religious Nationalism in Pre-Partition Bengal,” *South Asia Research* 26, no. 2 (2006): 115–31.

illustration reveals how the mental construction operates by identifying difference, or the embodied practices of the stranger, and attributing spatial borders accordingly. That said, it also demonstrates *how* the physical border is disputed, displaced, and- most strikingly- challenged by ‘mental constructions.’ On a broader scale, it also indicates that the deep-rooted and historically violent relationship between borders and territorialised identity remains vivid and continues to pervade postcolonial South Asia.

This chapter seeks to excavate the complex layers and facets of borders in their traditional location. It seeks to problematise, and go beyond, existing analytical dualisms of fluidity/rigidity, porous/sealed, illicit/licit, insider/outsider, and core/periphery. This chapter studies the border *from* the border by examining everyday border practices in order to ascertain how the concept of the border works on the ground. It is divided into three sections. The first section offers a border biography, which historically and politically contextualises India’s borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh. The macro politics of South Asian borders forms a basis from which to delve into the micro politics of the different borders. This context is of fundamental importance, because the macro politics of borders impinges on how borders are managed, re/produced, and contested. The second section focuses on how the border is operationalised through the practices, processes, and presence of the Border Security Force (BSF). Through comparative insights from fieldwork at four border locations, Dhubri (riverine border), Petrapole (largest land port), Karimganj (border town), and Pittal (border vs. working boundary) this section uses a dialogical approach to analyse the different *forms* of borders. It focuses on the fence, its associated processes, practices, and everyday rituals to highlight the multiple relationalities among border keepers, makers, and breakers. Finally, the third section uses the issues of cattle smuggling, Bangladeshi illegal immigration, and narratives of porosity to ascertain the relationship between ideas of nation and border practices.

This chapter advances two arguments. First, it suggests that the border paradoxically disperses and multiplies *at* the location of the border. It draws attention to the multiple and competing ideations of the border *even at the border*. Second, it argues that in its traditional location, the border, despite its imposing physical infrastructure, is fragile, tenuous, and requires constant re/production. Practices of border making, keeping, and breaking are all

constant processes that do and undo the border. Moreover, these practices, processes, and materialities yield fluctuating relations between actors at the border. This chapter tries to understand the complexities and incongruities of how the border as a line translates into complex reality on the ground. Relying on an assortment of primary sources, the chapter relies on semi-structured interviews, notes, and participant observations from border visits conducted with the Border Security Force of India, news reports, and an array of secondary sources. Finally, to clarify, this chapter focuses on the borders between India and Bangladesh, and India and Pakistan not with the sole focus on either case, but more with the intent of grasping the border in its physical/traditional location through the richness and diversity of these cases.

The preliminary fieldwork I conducted in Dhubri, Assam, and Cooch Behar district in West Bengal in August 2014 was undertaken independently i.e. without the help of the Border Security Force. This independent visit revealed several challenges of conducting border research in India. In practical terms, access to the border from cities and towns is not straightforward as border areas are remote, dangerous, and vast. At the border, the Border Security Force (BSF) maintained a sense of intimidation through regular interruptions, questions, paperwork, and prohibitions. It was evident that even at the border, the border was distant and information was fortified. In such circumstances, during my first visit, I was only able to access the border from the Tin Bigha Corridor that connected the Bangladeshi enclaves of Dahagram and Angarpota through a corridor in India which is open to civilians. These limitations revealed two key points that shaped the course of the subsequent fieldwork. First, for smooth field research at the borders, it was necessary to treat the BSF as an ally rather than an opponent. Secondly, vague personal networks were simply inadequate to access and study the borders in depth. Additionally, it also appeared that unlike their omnipresence on the field, the BSF was comparatively absent in the literature.

Bearing these factors in mind and with the aim of legitimising my presence and research in the field, I approached the BSF through official channels. Prior to my second visit, I arranged an interview with the Director General at the BSF headquarters in New Delhi. Recognising the difficulties of accessing both border areas and information, this interview

led to the BSF offering support to facilitate the fieldwork. As a result, in March 2015, the fieldwork was undertaken with the BSF in Petrapole in West Bengal, Dhubri in western Assam, and Karimganj in southern Assam. Subsequently, for a perspective on the Indo-Pakistani border, I also conducted fieldwork in Pittal in Jammu in December 2015. Their assistance meant that the BSF provided access, accommodation, transportation, and information about the border. Since border spaces are politically sensitive, remote, distant, and lack basic amenities, these provisions were invaluable. More crucially, it also underlined the more practical obstacles of researching borders in India. For instance, because access to the riverine border in Dhubri and parts of Karimganj is difficult, the BSF provided transportation to the border outpost via speedboats. In the case of Pittal in Jammu, owing to the security threat the border fence was only accessible from a bulletproof vehicle. At each border outpost, I received a detailed overview from the commanding officers of the respective battalions. I also had the opportunity to interact with the women officers of the BSF in Petrapole and at the frontier headquarters in Jammu. Through engaging-critically- with the BSF, the barriers for researching India's borders were overcome. The border and information about bordering practices became accessible and knowable.

In terms of the nature of the information gathered, some officers of the BSF preferred to remain anonymous, and chose not to have interviews recorded. Conversely, other officers were comfortable with being recorded under the condition of anonymity. Generally, officers were hesitant to be recorded as they believed the information was sensitive and suggested that I quote them from my memory and notes. Concerned about the consequences, there was a particularly strong sense of reticence among the women working for the BSF. Over time, I quickly learned that border locations are not conducive to making extensive notes. Moreover, in some locations the tension on the field was visceral. Even with the BSF, suspicion from the other side was unavoidable, especially in the borders like Jammu. The arrangements of official border visits organised by the BSF were difficult to 'record.' Additionally, the structure and pace of the border visits as well as the locations demanded brevity. Adapting to the nature of border spaces, I noted only key sentences, words, or phrases. As a result, I opted to document my visits through a visual photographic diary. Interestingly, officers appeared more candid and offered more detail in informal contexts, like over meals, *chai*, or during long car journeys to and from the border. Overall,

this chapter draws from extensive notes taken during and after fieldwork, recorded conversations, semi-structured interviews, and photographs. Lastly, having gained access to the border from the Indian side only, this chapter analyses and pays close attention to the one-sidedness of any border story.

Border Biographies

Borders have biographies, they are not *tabula rasa*. To study the borders between India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan it is fundamental to begin with a border biography. A border biography provides an account of the border that helps situate borders politically and historically. Nick Megoran argues that it is productive to think about international boundaries as having biographies because biographies illustrate how specific borders ‘appear, reappear and change, and disappear or become less significant in different ways and in different spatial and discursive sites over time.’³⁷⁸ In other words, these processes underline ‘how boundaries materialize, rematerialize, and dematerialize.’³⁷⁹ Megoran argues that this approach is ‘sensitive to the subtle ways in which the functions and effects of boundaries change’ and acknowledges that ‘international boundaries are both produced by and produce social life.’³⁸⁰ The border is tied to its geographical manifestation by its history and its changing political significance. Delving into history is not mere genuflection, but stems from a deeper recognition of the role history plays in making and shaping the contemporary borders of postcolonial South Asia. For instance, historian Ayesha Jalal reflects on lessons from history. She notes, ‘one of the most striking lessons to emerge from the history of South Asia’s contested nationalisms is how the quest for a homeland to call one’s own can lead to distortions and dislocations whenever and wherever there exists a lack of congruence between identity and territory.’³⁸¹ An exploration of the

³⁷⁸ Nick Megoran, “Rethinking the Study of International Boundaries: A Biography of the Kyrgyzstan–Uzbekistan Boundary,” *Association of American Geographers* 102, no. 2 (2011): 464–81.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 467

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁸¹ Ayesha Jalal, “South Asia,” in *The Encyclopedia of Nationalism*, ed. Alexander J. Motyl (Cambridge: Academic Press, 2000).

past inevitably shines light on the present. In this sense, borders are neither neutral, natural nor do they emerge out of context. Border biographies permeate into their everyday manifestation, politics, and management of contemporary borders. Additionally, the historical, political, and geographical background influences how borders between India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh can be accessed, researched, and ultimately known. Like any biography, a specific stance tends to guide perspective and outcomes. Indeed, this study admits to its India-centric stance, however, it mitigates this tilt through an awareness of its perspective and incorporating counter-narratives.

David Gellner refers to borders as the ‘most paradoxical of human creations’ that are both produced and suffered.³⁸² There is perhaps no better way to describe the borders of postcolonial South Asia than as produced, but more significantly suffered on an everyday basis. The borders of contemporary postcolonial South Asia are legacies of the complex, violent Partition of 1947. The Radcliffe line, drawn during Independence, divided Punjab in the west and Bengal in the east and formed the new states of India and West Pakistan and East Pakistan.³⁸³ The subsequent war for the independence of East Pakistan from West Pakistan led to ‘the second partition of East Pakistan in 1971.’³⁸⁴ Willem van Schendel uses the metaphor of an earthquake to vividly explain the genesis of borders in South Asia. He states, ‘when the earth’s tectonic plates move, the ground heaves and roars. Houses crumble, trees snap and people run around in panic. A deep fissure suddenly separates one half of the landscape from the other. And then it is all over. An eerie silence hangs over a land that is forever scarred, broken, double.’³⁸⁵ Schendel’s choice of adjectives, ‘forever scarred, broken and double’ are remarkably apt for explaining the effect of Partition in postcolonial South Asia. It seems that the damage of Partition is irreparable and

³⁸² Gellner, *Borderland Lives in Northern South Asia: Non-State Perspectives*. 2

³⁸³ For a historical overview, particularly from the Bangladeshi perspective see Hosna J Shewly, “Sixty-Six Years Saga of Bengal Boundaries: A Historical Exposé of Bangladesh-India Border,” *BIIS Journal* 34, no. 3 (2013): 205–19.

³⁸⁴ Sukanya Banerjee et al., “Engendering Violence: Boundaries, Histories, and the Everyday,” *Cultural Dynamics* 16, no. 2–3 (2004): 125–39.

³⁸⁵ van Schendel, *The Bengal Borderland: Beyond State and Nation in South Asia*. 1

irreversible.³⁸⁶ India's borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh continue to remain sites of violence, division, and mortality. In the words of Schendel 'Partition happened *here*, ' it is 'in the borderlands, Partition inscribed itself indelibly in the landscape,' that 'it was here that South Asians learned first-hand what it meant to be allocated to different modern states and to be separated by international borders.'³⁸⁷ To some extent, the memory, and paradoxically also the amnesia, of this traumatic history and 'the unfinished business of Partition' explains why India's borders continue to be considered such sensitive issues.³⁸⁸ Adding to this, the nationalist narratives of Mother India and the sacralisation of national territory also preserve and propagate territorial anxiety and sensitivity.³⁸⁹ Reflecting on this sensitivity, particularly in terms of disputed borders, Schendel claims that 'it is not the layers of border issues as such but the contested natures of their legitimacy that leads to sensitivity.'³⁹⁰ This contested nature of borders complicates the territorial dimensions of the state, blurring the limits of sovereignty and the demarcation between the domestic and the foreign.³⁹¹

³⁸⁶ It is also important to recognise two factors: on the one hand, such interpretations of Partition represent the Indian perspective and second, it is equally vital to not fall into the trap of Partition or what Mustapha Kamal Pasha refers to as 'Partition syndrome'. See Pasha et al., "Kashmir 1947: Burdens of the Past, Options for the Future -four Perspectives."

³⁸⁷ van Schendel, *The Bengal Borderland: Beyond State and Nation in South Asia*.

³⁸⁸ By paradoxical amnesia I mean the absence of any official monument, commemoration, or retelling of this history. In August 2017, marking the 70th Anniversary however, for the first time, a Partition museum will open its doors in Amritsar.

³⁸⁹ Cons, "Impasse and Opportunity: Reframing Postcolonial Territory at the India-Bangladesh Border."

³⁹⁰ Willem van Schendel, "Afterword: Making the Most of Sensitive Borders," in *Borderland Lives in Northern South Asia*, ed. David Gellner (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013). 268

³⁹¹ Vibha Joshi in 'The Micropolitics of Borders: The Issue of Greater Nagaland (or Nagalim)' reflects on the difficulty and procedures involved in accessing the borders of the northeast even for Indians, and the colonial legacy of the 'Inner Line' that necessitates the Inner Line Permit to access borderlands. Access to the border areas in India is terribly challenging. See Chapter 7 in Gellner, *Borderland Lives in Northern South Asia: Non-State Perspectives*.

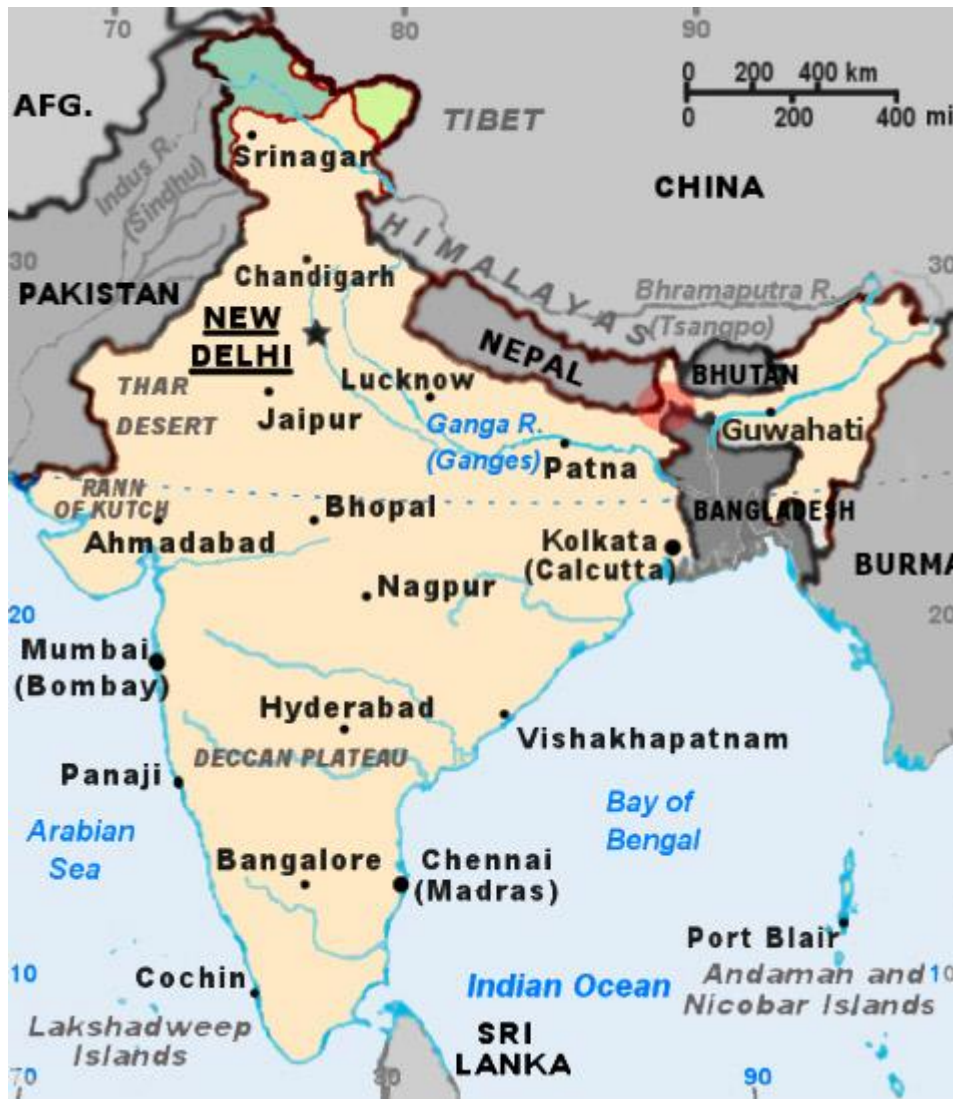


Fig 3.1 India's Borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh
Source: Creative Commons³⁹²

Since its inception, the contested border between India and Pakistan has been more capricious and problematic than the border between India and Bangladesh.³⁹³ The border between India and Pakistan is classified as follows: the international border, working boundary, and the Line of Control (LoC). In total, the border between India and Pakistan

³⁹² Source and attributions https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bangladesh%E2%80%93India_border (Accessed August 29, 2017)

³⁹³ For an excellent overview see Navnita Chadha Behera, "The Kashmir Conflict: Multiple Fault Lines," *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 3, no. 1 (2016): 41–63.

is 3,323 km in length and criss-crosses the Indian states of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab, and Jammu and Kashmir. Of this, the disputed LoC runs through 700 km of Kashmir. The Indo-Pakistani border is geographically varied, ranging from the marshy salt desert in the Rann of Kutch in Gujarat, to the arid Thar Desert in Rajasthan, the bountiful fields in Punjab, and the snow-capped Himalayan mountain ranges in Kashmir. These inhospitable geographical conditions pose difficulties for human life as well as maintaining a border. Politically, from Gujarat until Punjab, the border is mutually accepted as an international border, while in Jammu the international border possesses the contentious status of a 'working boundary' since Pakistani counterparts dispute its permanency.³⁹⁴ The border, more accurately the LoC in Kashmir, is managed by the Indian Army and not the Border Security Force (BSF).

The categorical difference between the border, the working boundary, and the Line of Control also emphasises the distinction between what the Border Security Force refer to as 'peace-time border management and war-time border management.'³⁹⁵ A BSF intelligence officer in Pittal, Jammu clarifies the conceptual and practical difference between the international border and the LoC in the following way:

Kashmir is totally different. There is no demarcation there. Where your army occupies territory, and where they [Pakistan] occupy territory, that line in the middle, that becomes the border. Just as there are pillars here for demarcation, there, there are no pillars. You are sitting there, I am sitting here, if you attack me at night and capture my position then it is your land. I am sure you have heard of 'no man's land', basically, that does not exist here. The international border is a very thin line, dividing this side into India and that side in Pakistan. For you, this area is yours, but if I take it then it becomes mine. For instance, a person can sit here and say the LoC runs 100 metres ahead of me, the Pakistani on the other side can say the LoC is 200 metres ahead of me, it is totally unfixed and there is no permanent marking system here.³⁹⁶

³⁹⁴ Pushpita Das, "Issues in the Management of the India–Pakistan International Border," *Strategic Analysis* 38, no. 3 (2014): 307–24.

³⁹⁵ Fieldwork notes

³⁹⁶ Interview with author, December 20, 2015, Jammu.

Such impermanence at the LoC determines the practices, embodiment, and imagination of those who must continually re/produce the LoC.

The fixation with the border and the continuing territorial dispute between India and Pakistan can also be attributed to the four wars the two nations have fought. These include the First Kashmir war in 1947, the Indo-Pakistani war in 1965, the Bangladeshi Liberation war in 1971, and the Kargil war in 1998. From the Indian perspective, these wars threaten the territorial sanctity and sovereignty of the Indian nation state. According to Itty Abraham, the persistence of territorial disputes represents ‘a public disavowal of both, the nation’s narrative of always having been there and the state’s resolute claim to represent this nationality.’³⁹⁷ In the case of India and Pakistan, the loss of territory permits external ‘scrutiny of the historical artifices of the material scaffolding over which the national imaginary has been produced.’³⁹⁸ In other words, the fiction of the nation, the legitimisation of power, and the control of territory are not only closely tied to the borders but also brought into question by them. These conditions are aggravated by the complicated and strained diplomatic relations between India and Pakistan. In the case of Jammu and particularly Kashmir, the everyday violence, border skirmishes, and shelling routinely displaces the local population.³⁹⁹ The Indian army’s aggressive militarisation of the area around the border has alienated the inhabitants of the region.⁴⁰⁰ The LoC is, in the words of Oscar Martinez, an ‘alienated borderland’ where routine cross-boundary interchange is practically non-existent due to extremely unfavourable conditions.⁴⁰¹ The border between India and

³⁹⁷ Abraham, *How India Became Territorial: Foreign Policy, Diaspora and Geopolitics*. 146-7

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

³⁹⁹ Nidhi Sethi, “Around 1000 Evacuated after Heavy Pak Shelling in Jammu and Kashmir’s Rajouri,” *NDTV*, 2017. (Accessed August 14, 2017)

“Jammu and Kashmir Villagers Apprehensive to Return Home despite Less Shelling,” *Daily News and Analysis (DNA)*, October 10, 2014. (Accessed August 14, 2017)

⁴⁰⁰ Paula Banerjee, *Borders, Histories, Existences: Gender and Beyond* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2010). 63

⁴⁰¹ Oscar Martinez, “The Dynamics of Border Interaction: New Approaches to Border Analysis,” in *Global Boundaries: World Boundaries Vol.1*, ed. Clive Schofield (London: Routledge, 2002), 1–15.

Pakistan has become ‘ideologically sacrosanct.’⁴⁰² Chitralkha Zutshi puts forth an interesting perspective when she argues the lives of borderlanders are defined by a paradox whereby the ‘inevitability of the LoC is accepted by both India and Pakistan at the same time as both deny its conversion into a permanent border.’⁴⁰³ This inability to dissociate the border from the territorial conflict has led to the reification of borders and exacerbated divisions. Along with the various contested cartographic lines that persist, Anasuya Basy Ray Chaudhury and Paula Banerjee contend that the LoC has become a volatile border zone where the internal and external dimension of one of the world’s most militarised conflicts plays itself out.⁴⁰⁴

Everyday border violence, skirmishes, and ceasefire violations committed by both sides have unfortunately characterised this borderline not as one between neighbours but as one between enemies. In addition to border skirmishes and regular ceasefire violations, the arrest of innocent fisher-folk crossing invisible maritime borders, inadvertent border-crossings, and even cases of alleged ‘spy-pigeons’ being captured by the Indian Border Security Force all attest to the continuum of border violence, its everyday implications, and occasional absurdity.⁴⁰⁵ For India, the central issues emerging from its border with Pakistan include territorial sovereignty and the claim over Kashmir, security threats, terrorism, border-aggression, and to a lesser extent drug and fake currency smuggling. Furthermore, after the 2001 terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament, the Indian Army deployed an estimated two million land mines throughout the border areas.⁴⁰⁶ This minefield altered the

⁴⁰² Paula Banerjee and Anasuya Basu Ray Chaudhury, *Women in Indian Borderlands* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2011). 63

⁴⁰³ Zutshi, “An Ongoing Partition: Histories, Borders, and the Politics of Vivisection in Jammu and Kashmir,” 2015.273

⁴⁰⁴ Banerjee and Basu Ray Chaudhury, *Women in Indian Borderlands*. 95.

⁴⁰⁵ IANS, “BSF Hands over Pakistani Woman Who Crossed Border,” *Zee News*, July 1, 2017. (Accessed July 28, 2017)

Lucy Pasha-Robinson, “Indian Authorities Arrested and Dealt with a ‘Spy’ Pigeon,” *Independent*, October 14, 2016. (Accessed December 1, 2016)

FP Staff, “India-Pakistan Relations: Islamabad Court Orders Release of 350 Indian Fishermen,” *Firstpost*, May 24, 2017. (Accessed June 18, 2017)

⁴⁰⁶ Shujaat Bukhari, “Deathtraps along the Border,” *The Friday Times*, April 10, 2015. (Accessed February 1, 2016)

very nature of this border terrain, costing several human and animal lives and distressing border inhabitants. Barring the LoC, elsewhere the border is fenced, floodlit and some segments are even electrocuted. India's border with Pakistan is one of the most militarised borders in the world and this infrastructure of division is visible even from space. The modernisation of this border is an ongoing process. Newer, ever-more sophisticated technologies of border control and surveillance are continually employed to renovate the border.⁴⁰⁷ This security infrastructure, coupled with the obvious political sensitivity and overall border paranoia, renders the border between India and Pakistan politically volatile, dangerous, and thus largely inaccessible for the researcher.

Conversely, the border between India and Bangladesh is characterised by considerably less animosity. Owing to India's aid during the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971, India and Bangladesh have shared largely amicable relations. During this period, the border between the Indian and East Pakistan (subsequently Bangladesh) was un-demarcated and open. The Indian government accepted over ten million Bengali refugees during this period.⁴⁰⁸ However, since 1947, and particularly since 1971, the conundrum of enclaves and the stateless enclave-dwellers has been a pressing concern for India and Bangladesh. Enclaves or *chhitmahals* are archipelagos of Indian territory surrounded by Bangladeshi territory and vice-versa. Owing to their incongruous nature, residents of these enclaves were unable to access public services and basic amenities. Leaving the enclave to undertake daily activities, access schools or visit hospitals without legal identification meant crossing international borders illegally.⁴⁰⁹ Complicating matters further, in some enclaves there were

⁴⁰⁷ "India to Install Smart Fence at Pakistan, Bangladesh Border," *Geo TV*, December 1, 2016. (Accessed January 4, 2017)

⁴⁰⁸ Antara Datta, *Refugees and Borders in South Asia: The Great Exodus of 1971* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2013). 8

⁴⁰⁹ The issue of the enclaves has captured the interest of many scholars. They been studied thoroughly from several perspectives. These enclaves have previously been conceptualised in various ways, like states or spaces of exception or as spaces of agency. See: Hosna J Shewly, "Survival Mobilities: Tactics, Legality and Mobility of Undocumented Borderland Citizens in India and Bangladesh," *Mobilities* 11, no. 3 (2016): 464–84. Jason Cons, "Narrating Boundaries: Framing and Contesting Suffering, Community and Belonging in the Enclaves along the India-Bangladesh Border," *Political Geography* 35 (2013): 37–46.

enclaves within them known as counter-enclaves. Despite efforts like the Nehru-Noon Accord in 1958, and the Indira-Mujib Accord and the Land Boundary Agreement in 1974, the issue was only successfully resolved diplomatically by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh and Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India in July 2015.⁴¹⁰ As per the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) passed in July 2015, India would transfer 111 enclaves with a total area of 17,160.63 acres to Bangladesh, while Bangladesh would transfer 51 enclaves with an area of 7,110.02 acres to India.⁴¹¹ This redrew the border between India and Bangladesh and the two countries exchanged territory. The LBA conclusively solved the humanitarian issues and presented citizenship rights to thousands of previously stateless enclave dwellers. The exchange finally granted enclave-dwellers access to state infrastructure like schools, hospitals, voter identification, legal status, and a sense of belonging.

While 1971 was an opportunity for the newly formed Indian state to reaffirm its sovereignty and control over its territory, this episode established two notions that continue to chafe. One such issue is the differential treatment of Hindu and Sikh refugees from East Bengal in comparison to the Bengali Muslims. This historically embedded statutory religious difference between evacuees (Bengali Muslims) and displaced persons (Hindus and Sikhs) continues to affect the Indian state's official position towards the alien/stranger.⁴¹² Antara

Reece Jones, "Sovereignty and Statelessness in the Border Enclaves of India and Bangladesh," *Political Geography* 28, no. 6 (2009): 373–81.

Reece Jones, "The Border Enclaves of India and Bangladesh: The Forgotten Lands," in *Borderlines and Borderlands: Political Oddities at the Edge of the Nation-State*, ed. A. Diener and J. Hagen (New York: Rowman Littlefield, 2010), 15–32.

Hosna J Shewly, "Abandoned Spaces and Bare Life in the Enclaves of the India-Bangladesh Border," *Political Geography* 32 (2013): 23–31.

⁴¹⁰ For a detailed history and contemporary overview since the Land Boundary Agreement and the enclave exchange in 2015,

The upcoming publication draws from fieldwork conducted in the enclaves since the LBA was passed

M.A Ferdoush and Reece Jones, "The Decision to Move: Post-Exchange Experience of Former Bangladesh- India Border Enclaves," in *Handbook of Asia's Borderlands*, ed. Alexander Horstmann, Martin Saxer, and Alessandro Rippa (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2018).

⁴¹¹ "India and Bangladesh: Land Boundary Agreement" (New Delhi, 2015). 5

⁴¹² Datta, *Refugees and Borders in South Asia: The Great Exodus of 1971*. 53

Datta claims that the difference in terminology between evacuees and displaced persons has certain communitarian and spatial connotation when applied to refugees from West Pakistan and East Bengal.⁴¹³ Datta explains that in India, Muslim refugees who had left behind property were described as evacuees, while Hindu and Sikh refugees in this context were those who had been ‘displaced’ from across the border.⁴¹⁴ Moreover, in the context of the refugees from East Bengal, the term ‘Displaced Person’ signified that those who were making this move were predominantly Hindu.⁴¹⁵ Thus, by using such a term to describe the refugee in the east, Datta argues that the government was trying to mitigate their claims to citizenship, by using a more benign term to describe them.⁴¹⁶ Interestingly, this difference is evident in the recent Citizenship Amendment Bill passed in 2016. According to this bill, illegal immigrants from countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, but belonging to Hindu, Parsi, Jain, Sikh, Buddhist, and Christian communities will be eligible for Indian citizenship.⁴¹⁷ Put simply, the borders of the nation-state and the idea of who can become a citizen reify religious difference.

Second, the notion that this border was and remains open and porous is problematic. Narratives of openness and porosity associated with the border generated vehement protests, particularly in the border state of Assam since the 1980s. After the initial sympathy faded, refugees came to be perceived as ‘carriers of infectious diseases, polluting the countryside and cities.’⁴¹⁸ ‘Bangladeshi Go Back!’ was the popular slogan of the fierce anti-migration agitations of the 1980s. Protests led by All Assam Student Union (AASU) from 1979-85 culminated in the Assam Accord signed between the Government of India and the leaders of AASU. Their primary concern was illegal immigration, and the key demands included: the detection and deportation of foreigners from Assam; the deletion of foreigners from the electoral roll; the issue of identity cards to bonafide citizens and

⁴¹³ Ibid.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ “The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2016,” *PRS Legislative Research*, 2016, <http://www.prsindia.org/billtrack/the-citizenship-amendment-bill-2016-4348/>.

⁴¹⁸ Datta, *Refugees and Borders in South Asia: The Great Exodus of 1971*. 11

constitutional safeguards to Assam. These issues continue to dominate and dictate the politics of the state.⁴¹⁹ However, the Assam Accord failed to resolve the crisis.

The fencing of the Indo-Bangladeshi border, despite being approved since 1986, remained largely sporadic and affected by delays, domestic politics and changing bilateral relations.⁴²⁰ The initial phase of fencing saw 854 km of the border in West Bengal being fenced and thereafter, fencing in states such as Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura were undertaken.⁴²¹ As per the Joint Indo-Bangladesh Guidelines of 1975, the construction of the fence is to be built 150 yards within Indian territory. The population density of 700–1,000 persons per square kilometre in many of the border areas, the 150-yard buffer zone cuts through villages, fields, roads and paths.⁴²² Despite receiving political support, the fencing project was strongly opposed by border inhabitants whose homes and agricultural lands fall within 150 yards of the border.

Reece Jones claims that this has changed after 9/11: India experienced a spate of terrorist attacks, the worst of which was the Mumbai terror attacks of 26/11 between 26th and 29th November, 2008.⁴²³ Multiple terrorist attacks, ensuing Islamophobic political narratives, and a sense of insecurity accelerated the Indian fencing project on the Bangladeshi border.⁴²⁴ Jones argues that the Indian political narrative portrays Bangladesh as a state that cannot control its borders and prevent radical extremists from operating within its

⁴¹⁹ Upadhyay, *India's Fragile Borderlands: The Dynamics of Terrorism in North East India*. 43

⁴²⁰ Duncan McDuie-Ra, "Tribals, Migrants and Insurgents: Security and Insecurity at the Indo-Bangladesh Border," *Global Change: Peace and Security* 24, no. 1 (2012): 165–82.

⁴²¹ Ibid. 167

⁴²² Ibid.

⁴²³ The Mumbai terrorist attacks started on Wednesday, November 26, 2009 and concluded on November 29, 2009. Six members from the terrorist group Lakshar-e-Taiba arrived via boat to Mumbai and conducted twelve coordinated attacks across public spaces like railway stations, hotels, and tourist locations killing more than 100 people. In general, there have been several terror attacks across cities in India post 2001. Notably in December 2001, the Indian Parliament in New Delhi was attacked but foiled. In 2003, there were several attacks on trains in Mumbai. However, in 2006, seven Mumbai local trains were bombed during peak hour.

⁴²⁴ Reece Jones, "Geopolitical Boundary Narratives, the Global War on Terror, and Border Fencing in India," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 34, no. 3 (2009): 290–304.

territory.⁴²⁵ Issues like poor economic conditions and political instability in Bangladesh cause millions of immigrants to cross the border for work.⁴²⁶ Countering this dominant perspective, Sanjoy Hazarika, director of the Centre for Northeast Studies at Jamia Milia Islamia University in New Delhi, argues that according to health indicators like infant mortality, Bangladesh is ‘better off’ in comparison to underdeveloped states like Assam, where the issue of immigration has persisted for a century.⁴²⁷ Despite these statistics, the figure of the Bangladeshi Muslim who poses an existential demographic threat remains.⁴²⁸ Paula Banerjee outlines a correlation when she states, ‘with every election and every census, borders become an issue.’⁴²⁹ Banerjee contends that the securitisation of the border has led to a focus on questioning the flows of undocumented migrants that threaten the Indian nation.⁴³⁰ Moreover, the 4096.7 km long international border between India and Bangladesh traverses lush green fertile fields in West Bengal, through to the mighty Brahmaputra River in Assam to the mountainous “abode of clouds” that is Meghalaya and the malaria-ridden forests of Tripura. These geographic environments are inhospitable for the BSF to patrol, police, and construct the border fence. Unlike the India-Pakistan border, the border between India and Bangladesh traverses very densely populated villages in West Bengal and Assam, making border management arduous and problematic. Despite the Indian government’s drive to fence the border, politicians’ promises to ‘permanently seal

⁴²⁵ Jones, *Border Walls: Security and the War on Terror in the United States, India and Israel*. 14

⁴²⁶ Ibid. 15

⁴²⁷ Sanjoy Hazarika, “Bangladesh Is in Better Shape than Assam,” *Hindustan Times*, April 14, 2016. (Accessed May 5, 2016)

⁴²⁸ The post/colonial preoccupation with practices such as census, and minority/majority numbers plays a very important role in the public and political consciousness. The narrative suggests that the population growth rate of the Muslim community in India threatens a ‘takeover.’ However, as per the 2011 Census, contrary to such narratives and fear, 79.8% of the population is Hindu while 24.6% is Muslim.

Rashmi Singh, “Relax. Muslims Are Not Outnumbering Hindus,” *DailyO*, 2015, <http://www.dailyo.in/politics/census-2011-hindus-muslims-population-christians-sangh-parivar-sadhvi-prachi-sakshi-maharaj/story/1/5898.html>.

⁴²⁹ Banerjee and Basu Ray Chaudhury, *Women in Indian Borderlands*. 4-5

⁴³⁰ Ibid. 5

the border’, and routine investments in sophisticated border technologies, the Indo-Bangladeshi border remains notoriously permeable.

The overarching friendliness and steady diplomatic relations between India and Bangladesh means that the Indo-Bangladesh border is less threatening and far more accessible and open to research. Bangladesh is considered a friendly neighbour state and not an enemy. For instance, the governments of India and Bangladesh have jointly opened several border *haats* or markets along the border to support and streamline small-scale informal trade between border communities. Indian states like Meghalaya, Manipur, and Mizoram have about fourteen border *haats* currently, while more are currently being discussed.⁴³¹ Similarly, on the field, some BSF officers described their counterparts, Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) as co-operative, friendly and referred to them as *purane bhai* or old brothers.⁴³² At the same time, it is critical to note that the Indo-Bangladeshi border is not devoid of violence. The Indian Border Security Force were described as being ‘trigger happy’ by a 2011 Human Rights Watch Report, for their indiscriminate shoot-to-kill policy and incidents of torture at the border.⁴³³ The worst episode of border violence in the recent past occurred in 2011, when a fifteen-year-old Bangladeshi girl, Felani Khatun, was killed by an officer as she crossed the fence with her father from India to Bangladesh. Shot in the chest, her lifeless body hung from the fence for hours before it was taken down. This dehumanising image became a symbol of flagrant border violence and a point of contention

⁴³¹ Government of India, “Ministry of Development of Northeast,” 2011, www.mdoner.gov.in/node/1485.

⁴³² Fieldwork notes

⁴³³ Human Rights Watch, “Trigger Happy: Excessive Use of Force by Indian Troops at the Bangladesh Border,” 2010. (Accessed January 23, 2016)

between India and Bangladesh.⁴³⁴ Malini Sur refers to the Indo-Bangladesh border as an infrastructure of violence, where dead bodies map the border.⁴³⁵

A prominent Bangladesh-based human rights non-governmental organisation (NGO), Odhikar, contends that the border between India and Bangladesh is the ‘bloodiest and most vulnerable border.’⁴³⁶ They allege that ‘members of the BSF also illegally enter Bangladesh territory and attack people residing along the border, shoot and kidnap Bangladeshis.’⁴³⁷ Odhikar’s statistical report claims that between the year 2000 and February 2017, 1,112 people have been killed at the border, while 1,027 have been injured, and a further 1,329 abducted.⁴³⁸ While Indian official figures are absent, the BSF admits to reforming its approach to border management. Officers on the ground state that they are only permitted to shoot as a preventive measure, in extreme situations, and strictly below the knees.⁴³⁹ Recent years indicate a decrease in the violence but not an end to it. During the period of this research (2013-2017), 141 people have been killed.⁴⁴⁰ While Bangladesh complains about India’s hostile and violent bordering practices, India also alleges that the porosity of the border has allowed the influx of approximately twelve million Bengali Muslims.⁴⁴¹ The Bangladeshi government, on the other hand, denies the occurrence of any illegal immigration. Even though the Indo-Bangladeshi border is not imbued with animosity like the India-Pakistan border, borders *are* violent even between friendly nations like India and Bangladesh. Aside from the predominant issue of immigration, for India, issues that emerge from the border with Bangladesh include smuggling of cattle, gold, fake Indian currency,

⁴³⁴ “Felani Killing: Justice Denied, Border Killings Continue,” *The Daily Star*, January 7, 2016. (Accessed January 8, 2016)

⁴³⁵ Malini Sur, “Divided Bodies,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 49, no. 13 (2014): 31–35.

⁴³⁶ “Violations in the Border Area,” accessed January 8, 2017, <http://odhikar.org/violations-in-the-border-area/>.

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Odhikar, “Human Rights Violation in Bangladesh-India Border Area from 2000 – 2017 (January-February),” 2017. (Accessed January 8, 2017)

⁴³⁹ Fieldwork notes

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid. (Accessed January 8, 2017)

⁴⁴¹ Bharti Jain, “Two Crore Bangladeshi Immigrants Illegally Staying in India Informs Rajya Sabha,” *The Times of India*, November 17, 2016. (Accessed December 14, 2016).

and a cough syrup called Phensidyl. Security threats of Indian insurgents or terrorists hiding in Bangladesh have also raised concerns for New Delhi.

Overall, these border biographies retell the palimpsests that re/make and shape border politics. They lay out the broader political milieus in which these borders are located. These border biographies reiterate the relationship between borders, international politics, and foreign relations shared between nation-states. Borders imitate and play out international politics and diplomatic relations. In the words of the Director General of the BSF, ‘foreign relations directly affect the border.’⁴⁴² For instance, the famous border ceremony held every evening at Wagah-Attari border between Pakistani Rangers and Indian BSF officers could also be interpreted as a performance of the political tensions.⁴⁴³ It marks the ‘display of inane yet belligerent antics in which goose-stepping Indian and Pakistani border guards, donning fan-shaped tufted hats, spend 45 minutes trying to out-kick, out-stomp, and generally out-perform the others, before lowering their respective flags and closing the border for the evening.’⁴⁴⁴ These biographies illuminate how macro politics affects borders and contributes to its changing and resilient political significance. In addition to comprehending the significance of border biographies it is also important to remain critical and consider what Sahana Ghosh refers to as ‘parallel biographies.’⁴⁴⁵ Ghosh invites parallel biographies as a form of unfolding counter-narratives. Excavated from the lived everyday experience, these micro-political accounts of borders are valuable for unsettling and contradicting dominant perspectives as well as revealing previously absent viewpoints. The relationship between macro and micro politics on the one hand, and border biographies and parallel biographies on the other, are central to this chapter. The next section will focus

⁴⁴² Interview with author, March 15, 2015, New Delhi

⁴⁴³ See Menon, *The Performance of Nationalism: India, Pakistan, and the Memory of Partition*.

⁴⁴⁴ Jonathan W. Rosen, “Line Dancing: Marches and Militarism at Wagah,” *Roads and Kingdoms*, 2013, <http://roadsandkingdoms.com/2013/wagah-border/>.

⁴⁴⁵ Shahana Ghosh, “Relative Intimacies,” *Economic and Political Weekly, Special Issue: Exploring Borderlands In South Asia* 15, no. 52 (2017). 50

on micro politics, bringing to the fore parallel biographies, highlighting the layers, complexities, and vicissitudes of borders on the ground.

Materialising the border: structure, scale, locations, and practices

The abstract idea of the border is materialised on the ground through diverse practices, objects, and actors. One such actor that transforms the border into an institutionalised and securitised articulation of the Indian nation-state is the Border Security Force (BSF). The war between India and Pakistan in 1965 led to the creation of India's Border Security Force on December 1, 1965. The BSF is an elite paramilitary force that acts as the first line of defence. They are stationed at the border to 'man' and protect the territorial sovereignty from infiltration and cross border crimes and instil a sense of security among border populations.⁴⁴⁶ The BSF is organised along the lines of a police force rather than a military force to avoid frequent conflicts and maintain a form of comity.⁴⁴⁷ For this chapter, the use of the BSF as an interpretive framework serves several purposes. It acts as an entry point and an organising device to approach the border. Moreover, for a thorough analysis of the border, one cannot ignore the BSF's ubiquity on the field and their role in bordering. Thus far, border guards between India and Bangladesh have been analysed through frames like sovereign power and as agents of exception.⁴⁴⁸ However, to broaden our perspective on border guards more generally, and to understand the border from the perspective of those who establish, police, and inhabit the border, I argue that it is vitally important to engage critically with the BSF. This approach also serves to question and invert the assumed power dynamic implicit in the BSF's role and presence at the border.

In addition to physical infrastructure like border pillars, the fence, and border roads, the presence and practices of the BSF are central to the materialisation of the border. In other words, the BSF transform the fence into a border. They demarcate, police, micro-manage,

⁴⁴⁶ Fieldwork notes

⁴⁴⁷ Anirudh Deshpande, ed., *The First Line of Defence: Glorious 50 Years of the Border Security Force* (Delhi: Shipra Publications, 2015). 22

⁴⁴⁸ See Reece Jones, "Agents of Exception: Border Security and the Marginalisation of Muslims," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 27 (2009): 879–97.

and inhabit the border space. This micro-management is both spatial and structural. Spatially, the BSF identifies, names, and characterises border spaces as border outposts. In this way, the borderline is subdivided, transformed, and ultimately territorialised as border outposts. For example, the border between India and Bangladesh is guarded by 77 battalions of the BSF deployed in 809 border outposts along the border, while the Pakistan border has 49 BSF Battalions deployed in 609 border outposts in Jammu and Kashmir, and Punjab.⁴⁴⁹ Structurally, this means that a border outpost or camp is organised under the broader hierarchy emanating from the national headquarters in New Delhi. This institutional hierarchy then permeates to the frontier headquarter and subsequently to sector headquarters in the region. The daily information accumulated by each border outpost also travels through this chain of command.

Border outposts are located at an interval of two to three kilometres. The recent construction of additional border outposts aims to reduce the distance between border outposts and enhance the micro-management of the border.⁴⁵⁰ Border outposts are self-contained but exist within an intricate system of border management. For instance, every border outpost that I visited shared physical resemblances in terms of structure and spatial organisation. For example, every border outpost, regardless of its size and location, included sports infrastructure, recreational facilities, and other amenities for daily life. Additionally, every border outpost that I visited even had a Hindu temple built on its premises. Minor details like the BSF insignia on cutlery and plates were also identical, from the frontier headquarters in Kolkata right to the riverine border outpost in Hatichar, Dhubri. Furthermore, every border outpost contained a key observation point from where the observation points of the other side are mapped with the aid of binoculars. In addition to the coordinates of the opposite side, the observation point also incorporated a hand-painted

⁴⁴⁹ ‘Border Management: Guarding Frontiers Challenges to Border Management’, Seminar Report, Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAW), New Delhi, 17th July 2014. pp. 8.

Presently, another 308 additional BoPs are under various stages of construction. The Indian side of the border is contiguous to West Bengal (2216.7 km), Assam (263 km), Meghalaya (443 km), Tripura (856 km) and Mizoram (318 km).

⁴⁵⁰ PTI, “Floodlights Installed along Borders with Pakistan, Bangladesh,” *The Indian Express*, June 7, 2017. (Accessed June 9, 2017)

map of the area under the control of the battalion. In many ways, this practice of drawing the border-map in accordance with the border outpost depicts how the border is re/mapped and rescaled to the size of the area under control.

The structure of the observation point is also salient, because it provided a visual summary of the border outposts. During official tours of the various border outposts, the observation point acted as a vital orientation point from which the officers explained their border outpost. From here, officers presented a well-rehearsed official synopsis of the area, highlighting issues like petty crimes and smuggling of cough syrups into Bangladesh from India as well as the ‘anti-social activities of miscreants.’⁴⁵¹ The observation point also contained information such as demographics of the nearby villages, including for example the percentages of Hindus and Muslims living there. Throughout the border outpost, a sense of homogeneity and replication of the Indian nation-state is sustained by using the Indian tricolour to paint structures, and flying Indian flags prominently. Photographs of BSF activities, including photos of the Director General, also clearly established the institutional hierarchy of the BSF. This practice of compartmentalising the border into manageable,

⁴⁵¹ Fieldwork notes

controllable, and knowable border outposts inevitably rescales the border. It lends a sense of uniformity to the heterogeneity of the border as a geographical reality.



Fig 3.2: An example of a map drawn at the observation point at border outpost Haridaspur, Petrapole, West Bengal. These maps also contain demographic information of the villages nearby

Source: Author's own

At the same time, I argue that the micro-management of the border leads to a distortion of scale. The division of the border into manageable border outposts alters how the border is experienced and materialised. To illustrate this, let me draw out an example from the border outpost of Pittal, Jammu. Within the BSF, this border outpost is infamous for border skirmishes and shelling between India and Pakistan. A year prior to my visit in December 2015, Pittal witnessed one of the worst instances of border violence. The visual remnants of this could be seen through the on-going construction work and the discernible damage to the structures of the border outpost. Describing this incident, Pittal's commanding officer reflected, 'See I tried to research this event on the Internet, for us it was huge, for 45 days we were fighting tirelessly. We fought a lot and there was a lot of firing. For us it was a

'*ladaai*' (war). But on the internet, it only appears as a border skirmish incident, it was not declared as a war.'⁴⁵² 'Does this inconsistency in reportage not bother you, your battalion lost an officer and two other officers were also critically injured, what did you think?', I asked. 'See, this is a common thing because both our (India and Pakistan) border management strategies and aims are different but because *we live on the border*, this opposition between both sides is expected and will keep happening (emphasis added). The level of fight depends... it can be verbal or with bullets, for us it was no less than a war... our boys were in a bunker for 45 days, even wars don't last so long, they get over in 15-20 days.'⁴⁵³ What is worthwhile to consider from the above exchange is how the containment of the border violence to the location of the border outpost altered the interpretation of this incident. Moreover, the extreme but limited extent of the violence employs a different sense of scale and proportion that exemplifies the difference between the border and the border outpost. Furthermore, this transformation of the border wedded to the idea that 'we live on the border' demonstrates how the border is conceptualised through the perspective of another kind of border-dweller, the border guard. The concentration, extent, and length of the violence on border outpost Pittal was severe and- to those present- akin to war. However, inhabiting the border distorts a sense of scale that perceives long-drawn border violence as fragmented, contained, and manageable.

Unlike the case of Pittal, however, there are instances where the rigidity of the border does not translate to the border on the ground. Regardless of the scale, the infrastructure and materiality of border outposts, there are cases where the border is still fragile and unstable. Here, geographical conditions pose a perpetual test for border guards. In some instances, the border is nearly impossible to establish. For example, this fluidity and tenacity of the terrain is especially acute in locations like riverine borders. In Dhubri, Assam, *en route* to the riverine border outpost Hatichar, which is located on a *char* or temporary island formation, a commanding officer illustrated this challenge with a simple exercise. As the boat sped over the aquamarine water, the vast scale and remoteness of the Brahmaputra

⁴⁵² Interview with author, December 20, 2015, Jammu

⁴⁵³ Interview with author, December 20, 2015, Jammu

River resembled an ocean. Shouting over the sound of the speedboat, the commanding officer decided to test my sense of direction. He said ‘take a good look before we turn the speedboat in a circle. Once we stop, you must tell me from which direction did we come from.’⁴⁵⁴ The commanding officer instructed his subordinate to circle the boat and switch off the motor. The speedboat quietly swayed with the undercurrent waiting for my response. Distantly, sandy islands were visible, yet all four directions appeared alike. Puzzled, I could not confidently determine the origins or direction of our journey. After waiting a few minutes, the officer solemnly remarked, ‘you can see for yourself, in these conditions we must know our way and recognise where the border is. Sometimes our officers lose their way for hours.’⁴⁵⁵ In the absence of physical demarcations or any concrete landmarks, the riverine border was governed by its terrain.



Fig 3.3: BSF border check point on a semi-permanent *char* or island in the Brahmaputra River

Source: Author's own

⁴⁵⁴ Fieldwork notes

⁴⁵⁵ Fieldwork notes

Nonetheless, in situations such as these, where the border is stubborn and difficult to construct, the BSF installed semi-permanent bamboo structures as border check posts in parts of the Brahmaputra river. Appearing to compete with the fluid geographical conditions, in the absence of demarcations or signs, the BSF check posts, border patrolling, and practices co-constitutively created a sense of the border. Thus, even in fluid locations, the uniformity of the border is still maintained and reproduced through institutional and physical infrastructure, visual appearance, and everyday practices of border management. As a result, even if border guards are transferred between locations or frontiers, their bordering experience does not vary drastically. Rather, what varies is the geography of the border conditions and the bordering challenges that emerge from this geography. As an officer at the riverine border outpost Hatichar stated, it is important for border guards *not to feel* the difference between border outposts and frontiers. Under the scorching sun and paralysing heat, an officer stated, ‘in locations like this where conditions are tough, there is severe heat, no electricity, no mobile network, and total isolation, we try to keep the *jawans*’ morale high.’⁴⁵⁶ Similarly, across border outposts several officers shared their past experiences of being posted in ‘tougher’ border areas. An officer preferred being posted in Karimganj, Assam in comparison to Tripura where the border outpost was accessible only on foot and supplies- including food- had to be air-dropped into the malaria-ridden forests.⁴⁵⁷ On July 3rd, 2017, the official BSF account tweeted an image of an officer in knee-deep water at the border outpost Longai, in Tripura with a caption that said ‘#prahari, Rain or snow #Bordermen stand guard unflinchingly, grit in determination.’⁴⁵⁸ While the image went viral, arguably romanticising the treacherous conditions in which India’s

⁴⁵⁶ Fieldwork notes

⁴⁵⁷ Fieldwork notes

⁴⁵⁸ @BSF_India, “#□□□□□□ Rain or Snow #Bordermen Stand Guard Unflinchingly. Grit in Determination....,” *Twitter*, accessed July 12, 2017, https://twitter.com/BSF_India/status/881886286964862978.

borders are established and maintained, it concurrently demonstrated that the tyranny of the border terrain can only ever be managed and not overcome.



Fig 3.4 BSF Official Twitter Account, with the caption [#□□□□□□](#) Rain or snow [#Bordermen](#) stand guard unflinchingly. Grit in determination....
Tweeted on July 3, 2017. Source: BSF official twitter.

24 hours of the day, 365 days of the year, the border is continuously re/produced through bordering practices of patrolling, surveillance, and border checks. Depending on the geographical conditions, border patrols are undertaken in different forms and to serve different purposes. Patrols can be conducted along the fence, or along the international boundary (IB), that is to say in the space between the fence and the actual zero line or border pillars to observe any encroachments or irregularities.⁴⁵⁹ Patrolling is also carried

⁴⁵⁹ Fieldwork notes

out on foot, camels, in a vehicle or bullet proof vehicle, using speedboats, All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) and with the help of BSF trained dogs.⁴⁶⁰ The daily life and bordering practices of the BSF officers are tied to the clock regardless of the treacherous geographical and weather conditions that range from snow to desert, rivers and forests. Responsibilities of female BSF officers include observing and patrolling areas that are frequented by female border inhabitants like rivers and agricultural farms. The role of the female BSF officer was originally a response to the necessity of frisking female border-inhabitants. Most female BSF officers are stationed in Rajasthan, Punjab, and parts of the West Bengal frontier. The role of female BSF officers is comparatively limited and supplementary. Their border patrolling practices are restricted to the day and they are only stationed in border outposts that have facilities for female accommodation.

On the other hand, male officers patrol the border areas throughout the day and night in either earth mounds along the border between India and Pakistan or observation points located at 200-300 metre intervals. Each shift lasts six hours, from 6am until 12pm, after which the next set of BSF *jawans* (officers) occupy the same positions until 6 pm.⁴⁶¹ Following this, in the evening the next group of BSF *jawans* occupy the positions throughout the night. While three *jawans* occupy one location, patrol duty is conducted on a three-hour rotational basis. At night, these practices of surveillance are accompanied by ambush tactics that use devices such as binoculars, night vision, and thermal-imaging devices to improve border management and monitor movements.⁴⁶² During patrols, minute or drastic changes on the ground- conditions like the height of grass, visibility of the border areas, or damage to border pillars- are all reported back. Daily observations to situational changes and information gathering are also incorporated in patrolling. For instance, daily practices such as 'stand to' in BSF terminology is an exercise whereby all *jawans* of a battalion occupy predetermined positions. This exercise stresses the extent and importance of observation in bordering as officers must be well-acquainted with their border outposts.

⁴⁶⁰ Fieldwork notes

⁴⁶¹ Fieldwork notes

⁴⁶² Fieldwork notes

During the ‘stand to’ exercise, *jawans* must observe changes on the ground from dusk to dawn. A BSF officer in border outpost Pittal stated that the main purpose of ‘stand to’ is to learn to identify physical changes: *‘jhaadi aapko raat mein aadmi jaise lag sakta hain – toh woh banda observe karega ki jo din mein mujhe aise lag raha hai aur phir darkness mein kya changes lag rahi hain - woh ek main aim hain’* (a tree can look like a man at night – so each person will observe how things may appear to be different between the day and night).⁴⁶³ The level of focus required to observe the minute details on the ground reiterates the extent to which the materiality and visibility of the border are imperative in observing, knowing, and managing the border.

The change of seasons and geographical conditions are also seriously considered. Factors such as visibility are crucial and the movements, sounds, and sights of patrols are all painstakingly measured. The border is reified through routinised border practices that include patrolling, border-checks, surveillance, and maintenance of border fencing and pillars. For instance, even on the mighty Brahmaputra River, boats transporting daily commuters from the *charlands* or islands to Dhubri town and vice versa must stop at the BSF border checks and produce their identification before continuing. These border checks construct the border through the work of the imagination and the everyday social practices of living near the border. In addition to the production of the border, at the border, identity too needs to be produced and reproduced through presenting identification. In this way, border guards and border inhabitants continually re/produce the border. Aside from the riverine borders, in most cases along the India-Bangladesh border, *jawans* gain an aerial vantage point by using watchtowers. A commanding officer in Petrapole explains patrolling through the language of domination when he says *‘patrolling yani ki humme area ko dominate karna padta hai, dominate matlab jawan ko maaloom hona chahiye uske area mein kaunsi jagga sensitive hain, jaise nadi, ya kahaan se koi aa sakta hai, aur phir woh area ko cover karna hai.’*⁴⁶⁴ (Patrolling means we should dominate the area, an officer

⁴⁶³ Interview with author, December 20, 2015, Jammu

⁴⁶⁴ Interview with author, March 21, 2015, Petrapole, West Bengal.

should know where the vulnerable parts like a river, or from where the border can be crossed, after identifying such areas he should cover those sections).

The use of the term domination reaffirms a sense of assuming control, particularly in a situation where the terrain and geographical conditions hinder control. The idea of domination is also striking in terms of questioning power dynamics between those who establish the border and those who inhabit it. This is not to say that border inhabitants do not establish the border or that border guards do not inhabit borders. It reveals, however, the divergent relationalities of dissimilar actors at the border. For instance, at the Haridaspur border outpost on the Indo-Bangladeshi border in Petrapole, West Bengal, an officer admitted that ‘the cultural and facial features are very similar on this side and that side, even if we catch someone on the suspicion of being Bangladeshi, we need to wait for the translator to come to interrogate them.’⁴⁶⁵ At the border, language acts as a barrier between BSF officers and the local population. Generally, BSF *jawans* come from parts of India with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds than the regions where they are posted. Likewise, Asif Miah, a border inhabitant in his mid-sixties, reflected on the BSF when he stated, ‘earlier there were never so many BSF men. When first those *bideshis*, (foreigners), came here no one here could understand their speech. They are not Bengali. Now people have learnt to follow some Hindi.’⁴⁶⁶ Intriguingly, inverting the dynamics of belonging, in this case, the uniformed BSF officers are strangers or *bideshis* in comparison to the border inhabitants. For the border inhabitants, their relationship with the non-Bengali BSF is marked by ambivalence, tolerance, and hostility.⁴⁶⁷ Such dynamics invert notions of belonging and suggest BSF officers as strangers. It also underlines the limitations of the

⁴⁶⁵ Fieldwork notes

⁴⁶⁶ Ghosh, “Cross-Border Activities in Everyday Life: The Bengal Borderland.”

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid. 56

BSF's 'domination' strategy of border policing and control. More importantly, it begs the question, who *really* dominates the border and how?

'The border is not the fence'

On tall eight-foot poles, corroded nails jut out menacingly while reams of twirled razor sharp concertina barbed wire layer underneath, giving the fence its form. In this way, the border imprints its visual, violent, and material representation. Constructed 150 yards inwards, the serpentine black fence runs parallel with the actual borderline or zero-line. India's fencing project has been interpreted as a sign of hostility and a flexing of national muscles. Duncan McDuie-Ra claims that this 'dramatic act of territorial enclosure' underpins 'a finality to the territorial partitioning of South Asia.'⁴⁶⁸ Fencing insinuates a 'hardening' of the border, the term 'hardening' vividly expressing the image and idea associated with this material assemblage. Driving through parts of the Cooch Behar district in West Bengal, amid the canopies of bamboo trees, the thick black metal fence appears to infiltrate the landscape. In a few metres, the black fence is abruptly replaced by a tall bamboo stick with a white flag that represents the imaginary borderline. Contrary to the linear image we have of border lines, the zero-line appears to traverse the landscape indiscriminately. Where the border runs through homes, the absence of the fence is compensated by imposing watch towers from where BSF officers observe the territory. Though the purpose of the fence is to demarcate and make visual and material a site of division, on the ground it appears forced and misplaced. The 150 yards between the border pillars and the fence is met with hostility. In some cases, particularly in states like West Bengal and Assam, it has swallowed the fertile agricultural lands of border inhabitants. Despite trying to establish a sense of security, the insertion of the fence perpetuates a sense of insecurity. The construction of the fence has inconvenienced border inhabitants and placed them under suspicion. Their access to their own land is now restricted and subject to complex administrative procedures. Since these lands now fall under the purview of the

⁴⁶⁸ McDuie-Ra, "Tribals, Migrants and Insurgents: Security and Insecurity at the Indo-Bangladesh Border." 166

BSF, farmers must gain permission from local authorities and provide the necessary paperwork to be included on the approved BSF list. Once approved, farmers must be frisked and re/produce their identity via national identity or voter identification cards every day before they can access their lands.



Fig 3.5: A border pillar depicting the zero-line located in between fields of India and Bangladesh in Petrapole, West Bengal
Source: Author's own

Access to the invisible zero-line is regulated. Inhabitants can only enter their land at select times, i.e. when the BSF opens and closes the gates. The entry gate on the fence in the border outpost in Haridaspur, Petrapole clearly states 'Respect All, Suspect All.'⁴⁶⁹ In some ways, the fence has re/placed the border by incorporating practices associated with crossing the border to practices associated to crossing the fence. Furthermore, the materiality of the fence has created new spatial relationalities of inside/outside. Narendranath Ghosh, a local,

⁴⁶⁹ Fieldwork notes

bemoans that ‘an Indian is devoid of the freedom to move around freely at the borders.’⁴⁷⁰ More particularly, the fence has disrupted and inverted the relationship between insider and outsider by altering notions of belonging. Emphasising the carcerality of the fence, Animesh, a border resident, states that ‘there is a feeling of being imprisoned when we are on that side of the fence, when we cannot enter the gates even if we want to. We want the gates to be left open all day so that we can move in and out freely.’⁴⁷¹

In addition to obstructing agricultural practices, the imposition of the fence onto the verdant rural landscape has also fashioned new ideas of legal/illegal and changed generations of familial bonds that predate the Indo-Bangladeshi border. Shefali Barman, a 26-year-old widow in Putimari, a border village in the Cooch Behar district of West Bengal lamented that she could no longer attend a nephew’s rice eating ceremony in the Bangladeshi border village of Boraibari; saying ‘I married into India out of greed for the *melas*, fairs, and now I am stuck ... no *jawa-asha*, (coming and going), for me.’⁴⁷² The meandering route Shefali usually took between Putimari (in India) and Boraibari (Bangladesh), across an unfenced portion of the border, had been closed due to a newly stationed Indian Border Security Force patrol there.⁴⁷³ Likewise, Shahida Bibi’s family crossed borders several times between India and Bangladesh during the war and through cross-border marriages. For her then, the replacement of the open border with a fence is both recent and unexpected. She says, ‘who knew then that the border would be closed? For so many years it was not a problem to cross the border, these checks and hassles are very recent. After all, India freed Bangladesh, who knew it would come to this?’⁴⁷⁴ On the one hand, if there are inhabitants like Shahida Bibi who question the origins of the fence, on the other there are those who feel compelled to abide with it. Majidul Hoque, a pharmacist and resident of the border

⁴⁷⁰ Debdatta Chowdhury, “Crossers of the Peripheries: Some Aspects of Cross-Border Livelihood Practices along the West Bengal-Bangladesh Border,” *Westminster Law Review* 5, no. 1 (2016): 1–11.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.* 5

⁴⁷² Ghosh, “Relative Intimacies: Belonging and Difference in Transnational Families.” 45

⁴⁷³ The border between India and Bangladesh is only fenced on the Indian side, Bangladesh has not constructed a fence. Therefore, border-crossers only need to cross the fence on the Indian side.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 49

village Kothalbari, is deterred by the fence. He declines offers to visit the family of his Bangladeshi wife. Hoque says, 'it is very difficult, they always put pressure on me to visit whenever we talk on the phone. As it is they [his niece and his sister-in-law] come *abaidya bhabe*, illegally. Bangladeshis have more courage than us Indians, they can be desperate. I am afraid to take them around on my bike, even though they have cards.'⁴⁷⁵ While the border and fence fail to dissuade cross-border marriages, despite wedding a Bangladeshi, Majidul seems afraid to be *seen* with the Bangladeshi.

Likewise, a middle-aged woman, Shashida, an activist for women's and children's rights with familial relations across the border states, 'I am always worried before I come. You know people like us have nothing to do with the BSF. I start trembling just at the thought of being stopped and questioned by them.'⁴⁷⁶ On the contrary, for Shashida's elder son Ashadul Hossain, who lives in Madhupur with his wife and children, crossing the border is not difficult. He said 'I am always telling her (Shashida) there is nothing to be scared of. She just has to be normal and cross the BSF checkpoint and the river. Once on this side, I go to pick her up from the (unfenced) zero line myself. Once when I was bringing her from the zero line on my bike, the BGB (Border Guards Bangladesh) saw and stopped us. I told them the truth and they let us go. It was no problem! We are respected in society, people know us, there is nothing to worry about.'⁴⁷⁷ It would appear that the possibility of crossing the fence resides in the minds of inhabitants, and how they view themselves in relation to the fence. In the case of Shahida Bibi's son, their respectability in society blurs the distinction between legal and illegal.

In addition to the new physical fence, border inhabitants also need to overcome bureaucratic and legal fences regarding passports and visas. Reflecting on the distance to Bangladesh and the difficulty of obtaining a passport, Sakhina said, 'Who can get passport to go somewhere so close [in Bangladesh]? That is for people in Kolkata. For us here, the

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid. 48

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid. 47

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

ID card is the only thing that matters.’⁴⁷⁸ For local inhabitants, recognition of the physical and the bureaucratic border between India and Bangladesh has yet to emerge. An Indian immigration officer at Petrapole stated, ‘most of the Bangladeshi visitors come here to meet their family or for medical treatment, the biggest problem we face is visa overstay. Most of these people are uneducated and poor, they don’t understand what these rules and regulations are, but we have to do our job and explain to them.’⁴⁷⁹ In many ways, the fence has created new relationalities for border inhabitants. It has generated diverse strategies of coping and subverting the fence. Familial bonds and cross-border marriages ensure that ‘illegal’ border-crossers continue to be ‘pulled by the heartstrings,’ but in some cases, it has instilled a sense of fear rather than security.⁴⁸⁰

Comparatively, in the case of Karimganj, a border town in southern Assam, the border and fence are considered peculiar because the border divides the town and the fence is prominent throughout the town. Karimganj is located near Bangladesh’s Sylhet region and shares historical cultural and familial ties to the other side. Karimganj is ‘severed from its parent’, since Sylhet was bound to go to East Pakistan, it was assumed, that Karimganj too would be gone along with it.⁴⁸¹ Bishwanath Ghosh claims that ‘for two days, August 15 and 16 of 1947, when the rest of India celebrated Independence, Pakistani flags flew over Karimganj.’⁴⁸² Separated from East Pakistan, subsequently Bangladesh, by the Kushiya River, Karimganj was awarded to India. Interestingly, Karimganj is one of the only regions where Sylheti, a dialect of Bengali is spoken.⁴⁸³ During my research, several BSF officers, across hierarchies and locations, highly recommended that this research included the case of Karimganj. The tired narrative about the border between India and Bangladesh placing front-yards into India and backyards into Bangladesh had not only been recycled in the

⁴⁷⁸ Ghosh, “Cross-Border Activities in Everyday Life: The Bengal Borderland.” 52

⁴⁷⁹ Interview with author, March 21, 2015, Petrapole, West Bengal.

⁴⁸⁰ Ghosh, “Relative Intimacies.”

⁴⁸¹ Bishwanath Ghosh, “On the Road to Karimganj,” *The Hindu*, November 16, 2015. (Accessed May 13, 2017)

⁴⁸² Ibid.

⁴⁸³ Sylheti is spoken in Bangladesh and parts of Europe like London where there are many Bangladeshis living.

literature, journalist pieces, and BSF perspectives but also held true for Karimganj. Journalist Subir Bhaumik describes Zohur Ali's home in Tripura in the following way: 'Border Pillar 2058, one of many demarcating northeastern India's 4,096-kilometre border with Bangladesh, sits right in the middle of his courtyard, splitting the family home into two countries.'⁴⁸⁴ Bearing this peculiarity of the Indo-Bangladeshi border in mind, I visited Karimganj to see the extent of the fence's invasion. While the fence was visible through most parts of the town, Karimganj did not match the hype. Here, the border and fence appeared mundane and inconspicuous. Through the course of the day, groups of locals walked or cycled passed the fence showing little recognition of its existence. A few metres further on, as I walked along the fence, I noticed clothes like frocks, shirts, and trousers were left to dry on the fence. For the villagers, the borderline was re/used as a clothesline. In addition to clothes hung on the fence directly, some clothes were also spread on the grass near the fence, domesticating the fence and the border area. Slightly embarrassed, a BSF officer politely requested me not to take pictures of the clothes drying on the fence.



⁴⁸⁴ Subir Bhaumik, "Soaring Divisions along India-Bangladesh Border Fence," *Al Jazeera*, October 1, 2015. (Accessed October 25, 2016)

Fig 3.6: The border fence used as a clothes line in Karimganj, Assam
Source: Author's own

Standing beside the fence, I stopped a local man who was passing by for a brief conversation. With the help of a Bengali-speaking BSF officer I asked, ‘does this border fence trouble you at all?’ Unfazed, he shrugged his shoulders and looked towards me and asked, ‘*ke fence?*’ (which fence) In this response, the tension between the banality and fetishisation of the fence became acutely apparent. From the foreground, the fence shifted to the background. In many ways, the over-determination of the fence into the landscape of Karimganj had rendered it so mundane that it is almost unseen. Having said that, it poses the question of to whom is the articulation and maintenance of this border and fence important? Karimganj revealed that the fetishisation of the fence was one sided, i.e. from the perspective of the BSF rather than the locals. On a deeper level, it reflected that the fetishisation of the border fence was in tension with the inhabitants’ indifference. In many ways, visiting Karimganj played an important role in reversing the question, and highlighting the role other actors play in fetishising the border fence. For the inhabitants, the border is nothing extraordinary.

In a similar vein, glances from local inhabitants as they washed their clothes by the river or conducted other daily activities reinforced a sense of intrusion. It appeared that the BSF was not particularly welcome here. Once again, the stranger appeared to be the BSF and the fence. Likewise, oblivious to the border, local inhabitants had built a make-shift bamboo bench in front of the fence. This make-shift bench reified a form of inclusion and simultaneous exclusion of the border from the landscape of Karimganj. In some ways, the fence became included in the public space of the border town and on the other hand, this inclusion undermined its original purpose. There is little doubt that the border and fence have intruded and disrupted the daily lives and familial ties across the borderlands. However, such subtle forms of indifference towards the fence paints a picture of border inhabitants with agency. This thick, black, supposedly impenetrable fence was arguably domesticated and conquered by clothes that were left to dry on it. Rather than something to be feared, in Karimganj the border fence is neither spectacular nor attention-worthy, instead generating feelings of indifference and banality. Countering this repetitive narrative of the border dividing homes between India and Bangladesh, and the fetishisation of the

fence, the case of Karimganj challenged these dominant narratives. It revealed how this uninvited guest i.e. the border and fence, were tamed, domesticated, and rendered invisible.

In stark contrast, however, the border fence between India and Pakistan in Jammu is uninhabited, electrocuted, and highly securitised. The unpredictability of ‘the other side’ limits movements and actions along the border fence. Unlike the Indo-Bangladeshi border, where the atmosphere was comparatively lax, the Indo-Pakistani border and its fence is surrounded by a sense of insecurity and unease. Predominantly, the border areas near the fence are inhabited only by the BSF. Armed and alert, *jawans* occupy positions of attack and surveillance in their earth mounds around the clock. Here the border fence is electrified. Even streams and small water bodies have been surrounded by circles of razor sharp barbed wire, thermal imaging devices and laser walls. In this tense situation, the border fence is not accessible on foot. According to the commanding officer, since the Pakistani counterparts challenge the legitimacy of the border in Jammu, and refer to it as a ‘working boundary’, the border is prone to violence. As a result, both border outposts and officers are susceptible to what they call ‘sniping incidents.’⁴⁸⁵ Though the BSF and Pakistani Rangers engage in confidence building measures, communicating and coordinating daily activities between one another, unpredictably on the ground continues. The BSF officers claim that the unpredictability of the border ensures that the border remains ‘active’, ‘political’, and diverts attention from Pakistan’s national issues.⁴⁸⁶ Highlighting institutional differences, an officer adds ‘we don’t know where their orders come from.’⁴⁸⁷

At border outpost Budhwar, a few kilometres ahead of border outpost Pittal, we waited to patrol the border. In the background, loud and intermittent gunshots were audible as *jawans* were conducting their shooting practice. Much like at Pittal, the mood at this border outpost was tense. An officer signalled me to sit in the camouflage painted bulletproof vehicle that was parked near the fence. Two more officers in an army green border patrol jeep followed

⁴⁸⁵ Fieldwork notes

⁴⁸⁶ Fieldwork notes

⁴⁸⁷ Fieldwork notes

closely behind us as it was safer to patrol the border in a group. At the back of the bulletproof vehicle where I was sat, there were no windows, yet the tall fence was visible even from the sunroof. The vehicle moved gradually and rattled through the uneven mud road along the fence. Electrical meters and floodlights were visible on the fence. As we drove passed it, I noticed empty glass bottles of Indian alcohol hanging from the fence at varying heights. It did not look like these glass bottles were caught between but were systematically placed. Nonetheless, I asked the commanding officer whether the bottles were intentionally hung on the fence and if so what purpose did it serve? Surprised by this observation, the officer remarked, ‘this is just a technique of the *jawans*, if there is any movement near the fence, the bottles will make noise and the *jawans* will be able to hear this especially in the dark.’⁴⁸⁸ Interestingly, at the border between India and Pakistan in Jammu, the fence thus does not just remain visual and material but acquires audibility too. Such ingenious tactics transform the border fence from a material and visual object to a sonic experience.

The stranger, the nation, and the border chink

The border or zero-line between India and Bangladesh in Dhubri, Assam, runs through the deepest channel of the Brahmaputra River. The Brahmaputra River is one of the few rivers in the world with a tidal bore; this means that the river has a very strong undercurrent. Since the borderline runs through the middle of the river, the borderline is susceptible to seasonal and geographical changes. In other words, changes in tide or factors like the monsoon or floods shift the zero line. These geographical conditions pose conceptual and practical problems. To begin with, the fifty-seven-kilometre-long fluid border is difficult to identify, demarcate, and fence.⁴⁸⁹ As a result, the border is both unstable and continually shifting. Complicating this, the Brahmaputra’s undercurrent also creates a ‘mosaic of *chars*,’ or semi-permanent island formations that routinely appear and disappear.⁴⁹⁰ Despite these

⁴⁸⁸ Fieldwork notes

⁴⁸⁹ Ministry of Home Affairs, “HQ Meghalaya Frontier: Introduction,” *Border Security Force, India*, 2016, <http://am.bsf.gov.in/introduction.htm>.

⁴⁹⁰ van Schendel, *The Bengal Borderland: Beyond State and Nation in South Asia*.

inhospitable conditions, the formations are inhabited by nomadic populations that have lived and cultivated the *charlands* for many generations. Large families survive owing to the ‘gifts of the Brahmaputra’, the very fertile land and the bounty of waters.⁴⁹¹ The silt nourishes the chars and gives the farmers a bounty of rich soil for cultivation every year. However, these supposed ‘gifts of the Brahmaputra’ do not alter the fact that life on the *chars* is characterised by underdevelopment, displacement, and alienation. The river’s current is dangerous as it can erode some *charlands* overnight while damaging habitats, livelihoods and the BSF’s infrastructure. Other infrastructure like a school and medical centre were built on stilts but remained empty and unused as they lacked full-time professionals, basic supplies, and electricity. Every year, the precarious geography of the chars, with periodic changes in the river level, pushes the residents to migrate inward onto more stable ground.⁴⁹² In addition to negotiating the fluid border and unstable terrain, these *charlands* are geographically, economically, and politically marginalised. Lacking basic amenities like electricity, infrastructure, medical and health supplies, the closest hospital in Dhubri town is at least an hour away by boat. Since boat transportation ceases post sunset, during crises *char*-dwellers are practically trapped on the *chars*. At the riverine border outpost of Hatichar, all structures are built on a semi-permanent basis. Packed into the BSF patrol jeep, two *jawans*, a commanding officer, and I drove to the border pillar on the *char*. Hatichar is one of the largest *charlands* in the Brahmaputra River, where the international borders divides India and Bangladesh. The absence of proper roads and the sand-like soil of the *char* made visibility during the drive close to zero. Yet, meandering through the dusty fields, we arrived at the zero line or international border. Although the border was unfenced, concrete border pillar number 1046 nonetheless stood on the temporary *char* between fields.

While *chars* are geographically alienated from the ‘mainland’ and detached from the mainstream population of Assam, politically *chars* and *char*-dwellers play a very

⁴⁹¹ Sanjoy Hazarika, *Rites of Passage: Border Crossing, Imagined Homelands, India’s East and Bangladesh* (New Delhi: Penguin India, 2000). 130

⁴⁹² Nikhil Roshan, “The River between: Bengali Muslims of Western Assam,” *The Caravan: A Journal of Politics and Culture*, April 2016. (Accessed May 22, 2016)

significant role. The inability to fence the riverine border has fed the notion that Dhubri is *where* illegal Bangladeshis either enter India, masquerade as *char*-dwellers, or conduct anti-social activities like cattle smuggling. Adding to the preoccupation with the figure of the Bangladeshi in Dhubri, the main issue that affects this border is the smuggling of cattle through the riverine border. Although 75% of the border is fenced, the vulnerability of the riverine border labels the entirety of the border as porous. While the issue of cattle smuggling is significant along the length of the Indo-Bangladeshi border, Dhubri is viewed as the hotspot. Admitting to the challenge of preventing cattle from swimming across, a commanding officer stated that entire villages are involved in smuggling cattle as this is their only source of livelihood.⁴⁹³ Former Director General of the BSF claims that in preventing smuggling, villagers ‘are not with us, they are against us.’⁴⁹⁴ Although cattle smuggling is a huge industry, cattle travel to the border from states across India like Rajasthan, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and even Punjab. Upon reaching the border areas, they are distributed between families and filtered out through this chink in Dhubri.⁴⁹⁵ The key challenge for BSF *jawans* in managing the border in Dhubri is to exercise control and prevent the flow of cattle from India to Bangladesh. At border outpost Hatichar, preventive efforts of the BSF were visible as a few recovered cattle were numbered, tied, and awaiting auction by customs officials. In many ways, this issue of cattle smuggling depicts how nationalist politics and preoccupations associated with the Hindu nation are replicated at the border. The persistence of cattle smuggling reflects the weakness of the Indian state, an open wound or chink in the border that exposes the Indian nation-state and supposed regional hegemon. Cattle smuggling is also intimately tied to the vulnerability of the Hindu nation, which is unable to protect the sacred cow from feeding the bovine appetite of the Bangladeshi Muslim stranger.⁴⁹⁶ In this way, the paranoia associated with the practices of the *char*-dweller or Bangladeshi stranger gets further amplified.

⁴⁹³ Fieldwork notes

⁴⁹⁴ Interview with author, March 15, 2015, New Delhi

⁴⁹⁵ Interview with author, March 15, 2015, New Delhi

⁴⁹⁶ The rise in cow-vigilantism particularly in relation to cattle smuggling in Assam is on the rise. See news report Bikash Singh, “A Mob Lynched Two Youth in Assam Suspecting Them to Be Cow Thieves,” *The Economic Times*, April 30, 2017. (Accessed April 30, 2017)



Fig 1.7: Smuggled cattle seized by the BSF in the riverine border outpost of Hatichar in Dhubri, Assam
Source: Author's own

Within public and political imagination, the unfenced riverine border in Dhubri is also deemed extremely problematic in Assam. The figure of the Bengali Muslim blurs the line between Indian Muslim Bengali and Bangladeshi stranger. I would argue that the working of an invisible border between *chars* and Dhubri also reproduces *char*-dwellers as strange/rs in relation to Assam. Associated with strangers and strangeness, *char*-dwellers are supposedly involved in border crimes like smuggling fake currency, illegal migration, or cattle smuggling.⁴⁹⁷ This criminalisation and suspicion is not particularly new, since historically, the nomadic population of India had been criminalised by the British and subsequently by the Indian state.⁴⁹⁸ Furthermore, *char*-dwellers are also held responsible for skewing the demographics of Assam. In other words, high fertility rates in parts of

⁴⁹⁷ PTI Feeds, "FICN Worth Rs 1 Lakh Seized from Indo-Bangla Border in Assam," *India.com*, April 24, 2017. (Accessed April 30, 2017)

⁴⁹⁸ Uday Chandra, "Liberalism and Its Other: The Politics of Primitivism in Colonial and Postcolonial Indian Law," *Law and Society* 47, no. 1 (2013): 135–168.

Assam have led to a surge in Muslim population, which is viewed as a threat to the Assamese population. To illustrate, the current finance minister in Assam, Himanta Biswa Sarma, alleged that ‘the Hindu rate of population growth is declining. But the Muslim rate is rising. Most of the Muslims here are from Bangladesh. If this continues, the Assamese Hindus will become a minority soon; we will lose our language, our culture, our identity.’⁴⁹⁹ Across India, this demographic fixation is ostensibly associated with the polygamous marriage practices of the Muslim community and their supposed inability to exercise family planning.⁵⁰⁰ This demographic fear is linked to census practices, and as per the 2011 Census, 79.67% of the population in Dhubri is Muslim.⁵⁰¹ The fear of numbers is associated with the visibly rising minority population as illustrated by Deepesh in the introduction of this chapter.

In an interview, the former Director General of the BSF stated that the demographic problem is ‘an alarming situation...even those who have come here sixty years ago, they have multiplied astronomically... eight districts in Assam were Hindu dominated districts but in the last thirty years they have become Muslim dominated. There have been very evident demographic changes in Assam, similarly in West Bengal.’⁵⁰² This notion of astronomical multiplication is endemic; for instance, at border outpost Hatichar, Dhubri a BSF officer described what he called ‘*char* culture.’ He explicated the correlation between the rising population of the *chars* and the religious and marriage practices of its inhabitants. On a sheet of paper, drawing a figure of a family tree the BSF officer illustrated, ‘each man will have four wives, on average with each wife he will have two-three children, you can do the maths’ he added.⁵⁰³ Owing to these narratives and stereotypes of strangeness associated with *char*-dwellers and their proximity to the border, the *chars* have become a

⁴⁹⁹ Rama Lakshmi, “Trump Calls for Mass Deportation: This Indian State Is Already Weeding out Undocumented Muslims,” *The Washington Post*, November 27, 2016. (Accessed June 15, 2017)

⁵⁰⁰ Kanchan Srivastava, “Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh Exaggerated Fear of Demographic Imbalance: Experts,” *Daily News and Analysis (DNA)*, October 29, 2013. (Accessed June 15, 2017)

⁵⁰¹ Ipsita Chakravarty, “The Huzoor in Dhubri: Meet the Perfume Baron Who Could Be Kingmaker in Assam,” *Scroll.in*, April 1, 2016. (Accessed June 15, 2017)

⁵⁰² Interview with author, March 15, 2015, New Delhi.

⁵⁰³ Fieldwork notes

form of border itself. In many ways, not only are the *chars* geographically located ‘outside’, but they are also portrayed as outside the norm.

Char-dwellers too are presented as peripheral, strange, and criminalised. More so, *char*-dwellers become bordered as their citizenship begets suspicion. In many cases, those who cannot adequately prove their legal status have lost their right to vote and have been added to the dreaded D-voter list, or doubtful voter list. Though the estimates vary, D-voters are concentrated in the districts of Sonitpur, Dhubri and Barpeta, the same districts most prone to flooding and erosion.⁵⁰⁴ By design and circumstance, *char*-dwellers are mobile owing to their precarious and perpetual state of displacement. Raiful Ahmed refers to the D-voters list as a way of inventing doubt.⁵⁰⁵ Ahmed argues that ‘doubt has become a permanent feature of Assam’s public discourse. Everything about Bengali-speaking Muslims has become a source of doubt – their mobility, land use, attire and, of course, their beards. Public discourse in Assam has produced them as a bearded, *lungi*-clad, parasitic stranger.’⁵⁰⁶ The linguistic boundary drawn around the Bengali speaking Muslim also invites doubt in comparison to the Assamese speaking ‘locals.’ The pervasiveness of the Bengali Muslim interchangeably labelled as the Bangladeshi stranger is consistently re/produced through these symbolic tropes. These notions are pervasive, recurrently consistent, and unfortunately oppressive. I would argue that this invention of doubt shapes the imagination and shifts the border with and to the location of the identifiable and alleged Bengali Muslim/Bangladeshi stranger.

In many ways, the border is fundamentally associated with questions of identity and belonging in Assam. The microcosm of the *char* and its relation to Assam, and the rest of the nation, represents the historical xenophobia against the Bengali Muslim. As Sanjoy Hazarika notes, ‘the border question has everything to do with the broader question of who

⁵⁰⁴ Furquan Ameen Siddiqui, “The Old Man River: Escaping Brahmaputra’s Fury,” *The Hindustan Times*, September 19, 2016. (Accessed June 15, 2017)

⁵⁰⁵ Rafiul Ahmed, “Assam’s ‘D-Voters,’” *Himal: South Asia*, 2014. (Accessed June 15, 2017)

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

we are, how we see ourselves and how we see others.’⁵⁰⁷ The stigma attached to the figure of the Bangladeshi and the discussion about migration and citizenship in Assam has been a historically violent issue since Partition and Bangladesh’s Independence.⁵⁰⁸ Hazarika claims that ‘the Bangladeshi word has become a pejorative to define a person you don’t like, maybe a Muslim person of Bengali origin, but it plays into the sentiments of people who say that we must deny these people space in our land.’⁵⁰⁹ For instance, every language in the northeast region has a word for outsider. Ironically, in Assam it is *Bongal*, which has become a derogatory term.⁵¹⁰ The common perception in Assam is that Bangladeshis inhabit the border areas even on the Indian side. In parts of Assam like Hatimuria, the narratives and stereotyping of alleged Bangladeshis is vehement. The Bangladeshi label is flippantly handed out. Noor Jamal Ali, a 30-year-old tailor states, ‘these days, the public mood is very negative. You have an argument with somebody on the street and they call you a Bangladeshi.’⁵¹¹ Malini Sur also notes that ‘It has been established that Muslims – as a religious minority and as border residents in India – face threats of deportation and border violence.’⁵¹² Contrasting the mobility of Bengali men with *Adivasi* or tribal women

⁵⁰⁷ Interview with author, March 14, 2015, New Delhi

⁵⁰⁸ Nellie Massacre in 1983 is considered a closely guarded secret. It is an example of the horrific violence endured by Bengali Muslims in Assam. This took place on February 18, 1983 in a span of six hours when thirteen villages in Nagaon district were surrounded by people with machetes and weapons. Official figures suggest 1,800 people were killed but unofficial numbers suggest numbers to the tune of 3,000. See Subasri Krishnan, “Thirty-Two Years Later, the Nellie Massacre Remains All But Forgotten,” *The Caravan: A Journal of Politics and Culture*, February 2015. (Accessed, July 12, 2015)

⁵⁰⁹ Interview with author, March 14, 2015, New Delhi

⁵¹⁰ Interview with author, March 14, 2015, New Delhi

⁵¹¹ Lakshmi, “Trump Calls for Mass Deportation: This Indian State Is Already Weeding out Undocumented Muslims.” (Accessed June 15, 2017)

⁵¹² Kalir and Sur, “‘Bamboo Baskets and Barricades: Gendered Landscapes at the India–Bangladesh Borderlands.’”

at the border, Sur argues that unlike the men, women are dismissed as politically insignificant and thereby escape labels of ‘terrorist’ or ‘infiltrator.’⁵¹³

The figure of the illegal Bangladeshi has been deeply politicised and manipulated in Assam’s domestic politics. The Indian National Congress (INC) party is blamed by Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) for appeasing Muslims and remaining ambivalent on the issue of immigration as immigrants form the INC’s vote-bank. As per the AGP’s xenophobic fears, ‘Assam shouldn’t be made a dumping ground by being forced to accept the immigrants.’⁵¹⁴ The notion of ‘a dumping ground’ is particularly vivid in characterising perspectives towards outsiders or strangers. Conversely, the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) party is believed to represent the concerns of Bengali Muslims. Aminul Islam of the AIUDF claims that ‘if indeed there are illegal immigrants, send them back. But don’t stamp the Bangladeshi tag on all Muslims so loosely.’⁵¹⁵ In addition to the demographic threat, the fear of Islamic radicalisation also looms large according to anti-immigration activists in Assam. Islamophobic narratives are intertwined with anti-immigrant sentiment. For instance, according to activist Samujjal Bhattacharya, the recent launch of the ‘detect-delete-deport campaign’ in Assam ‘is even more important because now Islamic extremist groups from Bangladesh are also sending their people to India along with the immigrants on this route.’⁵¹⁶ Overall, the *chars* do not simply represent the failure to seal the border but more deeply demonstrate the anxieties of the Hindu nation state, through the fear of the stranger or Bangladeshi Muslim and cattle

⁵¹³ Sur, “Through Metal Fences: Material Mobility and the Politics of Transnationality at Borders.”

⁵¹⁴ Rahul Karmakar, “Deportation of 17 Bangladeshi Immigrants from Assam Postponed,” *The Hindustan Times*, January 9, 2017. (Accessed June 15, 2017)

⁵¹⁵ Lakshmi, “Trump Calls for Mass Deportation: This Indian State Is Already Weeding out Undocumented Muslims.” (Accessed June 15, 2017)

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

smuggling. Despite their marginality, the fringes of the fringe are locations where the preoccupations of the nation are pronounced.

Conclusions

In summary, this chapter has undertaken a multi-sited and dialogical approach towards analysing how the concept of the border translates onto the ground through different geographical and political *forms* of borders. For instance, while the management of the border in Dhubri is determined by the fluidity of the terrain, the management of the LoC is governed by its political unfixity. The chapter has demonstrated that borders are inhospitable, distant, and contrary to their function, generate feelings of insecurity rather than a sense of security. Despite their rigidity, borders appeared fragile, and in search of meaning, legitimacy, and relevance. The bordering practices of the BSF were essential to give meaning to the fence and continually reaffirm the border, even at the border. The materiality of the border, the intrusion of the visible, tall black fence imposing the rural landscape of West Bengal, Assam and Jammu was *still* inadequate to render the border airtight. Despite the thermal imaging, around-the-clock patrols by border guards, and the audibility of the fence, the border was still subverted, transgressed and domesticated. These practices of making, keeping and breaking the border continually do and undo the border. The border, despite its overpowering presence, performativity, and reproduction appeared almost tenuous in its most explicit, visible, physical, and violent manifestation. At the border, the figure of the stranger is not fixed, but develops and shifts based on context. As some cases reveal, the stranger at the border was not necessarily the familial border crosser, but the non-Bengali speaking BSF officer. In some cases, the stranger was not from across the border but in fact, the intrusive and uninvited fence. The figure of the stranger contradicts and simultaneously reaffirms the border. While the border is physically constructed, the visible and identifiable figure of the stranger constructs another border. Moreover, while the figure of the stranger is constructed through rigid narratives, at the same time, the stranger is also identifiable and mobile. As a result, the identifiability and mobility of the stranger contradicts the locations of the physical border while dispersing and reifying another form of border. Unlike the enclaves, the *chars* have attracted little attention from the border studies community. The case of the *chars* and *char*-dwellers

demonstrate how ideas, stereotypes, and figures of the strange/r are circulated and sustained. The *char* and its dwellers are affected by their peripheral location and bordered by their ‘strangeness.’

Understanding the border from the perspective of the BSF is instructive in outlining parallel biographies of the border. The BSF play a prominent role in constructing the border and giving meaning to the fence. From their perspective, the border is an imaginary line, which is materialised through their presence and fence. Engaging with the BSF revealed the way in which the border is frangible; as a result, how the border transforms into the border outpost. This rescaling of the border also alters the way in which the BSF experience and interpret violence. While border management is romanticised and fetishised on the one hand, the banality associated with border violence is also shared by border inhabitants. For instance, the case of Pittal also shows how living at the border changes one’s relationship with the border, much like the inhabitants of the border town in Karimganj. Additionally, the BSF also helped shed light on the multiple relationalities at the border. In addition to the expected relationships between the BSF and locals, and the BSF and their bordering counterparts; the relationship between the BSF and their border habitat was also instructive. It contributes to constructing the different kinds of forces/enemies that the BSF contend with. It appeared that the natural terrain of the border is as important to understand, observe, and learn as the other strangers. This aspect not only contributes to the fetishisation of the fence, but also produces the border as strange and unpredictable. Concurrently, in this overly fetishised and part self-congratulatory narrative by the BSF, the counter-narratives of border inhabitants’ description of the mundane-ness of the fence/border and natural habitat are noteworthy.

This chapter has suggested that concepts of the border and fence converge and diverge. In some cases, the construction of the fence reaffirms the border while in cases of its absence, the border is practiced through the work of the imagination. Though the fence dominates the landscape, and forms the cornerstone of India’s border management policy, it is imperative not to mistake the fence for the border. While the fence could be viewed as a material articulation of the border, it is *not* the border. As a young commanding officer at Karimganj, Assam clarified, ‘the border is not the fence; the border is the imaginary line

that connects one border pillar to the other.’⁵¹⁷ The fence is the physical barrier of the border, not the border itself. It appears that the border, even in its original location is ‘ultimately imagined.’⁵¹⁸ I would argue that the border and the fence are co-determinant. However, the paradox could be more explicitly stated: the fence is a fetish and ever-present, to some extent it also legitimises the BSF’s existence. At the same time, the fence is irrelevant in a field where macro-political decisions and more micro-local relations determine when and how the fence is crossed, subverted, or transgressed. Paradoxically, the fence becomes irrelevant at the point when it needs to be ‘overcome.’ In other words, the relevance of the fence lies in its stationary, almost ghost-like, dead existence with outposts on either side effectively monitoring the lack of activity around it. Overall, the fence engenders multiple relationalities and contradictory reactions fluctuating between fear, indifference, subversion, security, and insecurity. The meaning and significance of the fence varies across locations and contexts. In the case of the comparatively less violent border between India and Bangladesh, the fence has to some extent it has obstructed daily life, but at the same time, the fence has been appropriated and domesticated by inhabitants. As the fence in Karimganj and Jammu demonstrates, the fence is appropriated by its inhabitants, whether it is through domestic practices of drying clothes on the fence or BSF officers hanging empty glass bottles on it. Furthermore, my fieldwork in Karimganj elucidated the underlying fetishisation of the border and fence. Unlike the border between India and Bangladesh, the border between India and Pakistan is not porous but rigid, securitised and sealed. Cross-border movements are close to impossible. Yet, as if to confirm the limitations of the fence and borderless-ness of technology, surpassing the fence and the BSF *jawans*, at the border outpost Pittal, my Indian phone lost signal, while my British mobile received a message: ‘Welcome to Pakistan!’

⁵¹⁷ Interview with author, March 2015, Karimganj, Assam.

⁵¹⁸ Fieldwork notes

Chapter Four: The City

Lego Blocks

Meena Menon begins *Reporting Pakistan* with a well-meaning warning she received from a *Shiv Sainik*⁵¹⁹ advising her not to cross the ‘border’ into Pakistan, where ‘the mosques are full of bombs and guns.’⁵²⁰ Menon proceeds to clarify that in *Reporting Pakistan* she is referring to Pakistan the neighbour, and not the neighbourhood that the *Shiv Sainik* identifies as Pakistan. The *Shiv Sainik* sought to prevent Menon from crossing ‘the border’ into Jogeshwari, a Muslim dominated neighbourhood in Mumbai’s suburbs.⁵²¹ This time, however, the journalist- whose reportage included the Bombay Riots- intended to cross the international border as a correspondent for an Indian newspaper in Islamabad. Although seemingly trivial, this clarification on Menon’s part is noteworthy. It exemplifies the multiple notions of Pakistan, its location and borders. What makes notions of Pakistan - real, imagined, delineated- exist in the imaginations in *Mumbaikars*⁵²²? Unlike the border in its traditional location, discussed in the previous chapter, ‘the border’ in Mumbai is neither guarded by Border Security Force officers, nor is there a fence, or a zero line. Given their absence, why do ideas of the border and notions of territory appear so strongly in the city? Menon’s answer to this question is to compare the border to ‘a Lego block’, adding ‘you can place it anywhere and create division; we don’t seem to cross it easily and we don’t need visas certainly but we never jump the fence for fear of finding out the truth.’⁵²³ This fungibility of the border infrastructure is akin to Lego blocks, whether physical, or imagined; despite their mobility, however, as Menon stresses, they are not crossed easily. In this context, the questions that emerge are: what restricts the crossing of these borders?

⁵¹⁹ Shiv Sainik is a term used to refer to members belonging to the Shiv Sena, a regional political party predominantly relevant in Maharashtra state politics. Mumbai is the capital of the western state of Maharashtra.

⁵²⁰ Meena Menon, *Reporting Pakistan* (Gurgaon: Penguin Random House India, 2017). xi

⁵²¹ Meena Menon is a journalist who has covered the Bombay Riots in 1993 and authored the book *Riots and After Mumbai*.

⁵²² Mumbaikar is a Marathi term used for people living in Mumbai. Marathi is the regional language of the state of Maharashtra.

⁵²³ Ibid. xiv

Put differently, how are these borders or no-go areas maintained in the city? Are they more or less effective than the fences at the border discussed in the previous chapter?

The aim of this chapter is to understand the ways in which, ideas, practices, and narratives of the border are evoked, produced, and sustained in the city. The chapter approaches the issue of borders in two ways: first, by problematising the common notion of *chhota* or mini-Pakistan, the nomenclature given to Muslim dominated areas in the city. The second entails questioning the lurking figure of the Bangladeshi in Mumbai. Attentive to the differences between *chhota* Pakistan and the figure of the Bangladeshi, this chapter does not equate the two; instead, it aims to draw out the underlying differences and implications of these categories and the ideas of borders they produce and reproduce. This chapter strives to understand the relationship between margins, marginality, and ideas of borders in the city.

This chapter is organised in four sections. The first section discusses the relationship between the border and the city as analytical tools, and asks how these concepts work together. Consequently, it also discusses how the methodological approach of this thesis has been applied to this case. The second section offers a historical overview of colonial and postcolonial Bombay and Mumbai, delving into the Bombay Riots to trace the origins of *chhota* or mini-Pakistans in the city. This section underlines how ideas of borders emerged during the riots and the way these affected notions of belonging, identity, spatiality in the city. The third section explores the notion of mini-Pakistans in contemporary Mumbai in order to ascertain the continuities or discontinuities in ideas about borders and spatial practices of exclusion in the city. This section draws on everyday narratives, stereotypes, and stigma as well as the counter-narratives associated with producing the Muslim stranger. The fourth and final section examines the phantasmic figure of the Bangladeshi in Mumbai; it outlines how the strange/r, or the figure of the Bangladeshi, appears within the city. Overall, this chapter argues that ideas, narratives, and practices of borders appear persuasive but equally difficult to pin down in the city. There is no one singular notion of the border in the city, however, and like the border in its traditional location, the border or ideas of the border are heterogeneous, variable, and complex. Through subtle forms of marking territory, and traditional logics of this/that side, ideas of borders both appear and are also subverted and challenged. Contrary to the dualistic or

binary ideas like us/them or Hindus/Muslims – ‘the border’ or ideas of the border in the city are not simplistic but more complex.

Border and city

Recent studies of South Asia’s borderlands identify the connection between the city and border through the figure of the Muslim citizen who is cast as the “outsider” or “internal enemy” and the identification of areas as “mini-Pakistans.”⁵²⁴ Scholars point to the inward movements of the national border, whereby political borders are ‘transposed onto internal spatial, sociopolitical and cultural borders within the geographic heart of the nation.’⁵²⁵ These studies realign the focus of the border from territory to newer debates about internal jurisdiction, fear, marginality, affect, and desire.⁵²⁶ Concurrently, scholars claim that South Asia has recently witnessed an ‘urban turn’ whereby cities in the global South are gaining focus within broader debates about urbanisation, housing, and development.⁵²⁷ The literature on riots and ethno-national or collective violence in South Asian studies has also seen more attention paid to Muslim marginalisation and urban spaces, especially in the aftermath of the Bombay Riots in 1992-93. After the 2002 Gujarat Riots, the United Progressive Alliance Government (UPA) undertook an official report to study the social, economic, and educational conditions of Muslims in India. The Sachar Report revealed that compared to other communities, Muslims remain on the margins in terms of their access to

⁵²⁴ Farhana Ibrahim and Tanuja Kothiyal, “Beyond Territorial and Jurisdictional Confines,” *Economic and Political Weekly, Special Issue: Exploring Borderlands In South Asia* 52, no. 15 (2017): 32–36.

⁵²⁵ Ibid. 32

Cons and Sanyal also refer to marginality in the city along similar lines. See Sanyal and Cons, “Geographies at the Margins: Borders in South Asia - an Introduction.”

⁵²⁶ Piliavsky, “Borders without Borderlands: On the Social Reproduction of State Demarcation in Rajasthan.”

⁵²⁷ Gyan Prakash, “The Urban Turn,” in *Sarai Reader: The Cities of Everyday Life*, ed. Ravi S Vasudevan et al. (Delhi: Sarai Publishing, 2002), 2–7.

Nikhil Anand and Anne Rademacher, “Housing in the Urban Age: Inequality and Aspiration in Mumbai,” *Antipode* 43, no. 5 (2011): 1748–1772.

Andrew Harris, “The Metonymic Urbanism of Twenty-First-Century Mumbai,” *Urban Studies* 49, no. 13 (2012): 2955–73.

Doug Saunders, *Arrival City* (London: Windmill, 2011).

education, infrastructure, and credit as well as employment in public and private sectors. These factors have catalysed diverse approaches across different strands of literature to examine Muslims in urban India and Muslim marginality more generally.⁵²⁸ The issues of identity, security, and equity are considered increasingly significant for India's 13.5% of Muslims and are also influenced by the underlying tensions of minority-majority politics in postcolonial India.⁵²⁹

Taking into consideration the urban turn, as well as the convergence between Muslims and marginality in urban spaces, two issues remain. One, the connections between these iterations of the border in the city and the national border have not been considered in unison. The concept of the border could play a central part in connecting the city of Mumbai to the realm of the international by marking the city as a key geopolitical space in contemporary South Asia. Treating the city as 'a political site of everyday practice provides valuable insights into the linkages of macro processes with the texture and fabric of human experience.'⁵³⁰ Two, the notion of mini-Pakistan and its borders need to be thoroughly questioned. Beyond the articulations and identifications of mini-Pakistans, exactly how these borders work and what they mean have seldom been explored. Perhaps more importantly for this study, we are also unaware of how national borders relate to the border

⁵²⁸ See Rowena Robinson, "Indian Muslims: The Varied Dimensions of Marginality," *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no. 10 (2007): 839–43.

Surinder S. Jodha, "Perceptions and Receptions: Sachar Committee and the Secular Left," *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no. 29 (2007): 2996–99.

Taha Abdul Rauf, "Violence Inflicted on Muslims: Direct, Cultural and Structural," *Economic and Political Weekly* 46, no. 23 (2011): 69–76.

Philippa Williams, *Everyday Peace?: Politics, Citizenship and Muslim Lives in India* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015).

⁵²⁹ Ghyanshyam Shah, "The Condition of Muslims," *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no. 10 (2007): 836–39. 837

⁵³⁰ Seth Low, ed., *Theorising the City: The New Urban Anthropology Reader* (USA: Rutgers University Press, 1999). 2

in the city, as the use of the term ‘border’ to explain divisions and the appearance of border-logic in the city has not been thoroughly examined.

Across Indian cities, the notion of the Muslim ghetto like the *musholman para* in Kolkata, or neighbourhoods like Delhi’s Old City or Jamia Nagar, Zakir Nagar, Ahmedabad’s Juhapura and Citizen Nagar are locations that are associated with spatial segregation in India.⁵³¹ In the case of Ahmedabad, Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi, in *Pogrom in Gujarat*, presents a sharp ethnographic intervention on Hindu nationalism and anti-Muslim violence during and after the Gujarat riots of 2002. He traces how the ‘spatial grammar of the city is characterized by ‘border areas’ and police posts.’⁵³² For example, ‘in the grammar of inner-city space in Ahmedabad,’ the existence of permanent police posts mark border areas by making visible and enlivening the Hindu-Muslim binary, and inscribing it in the city landscape.⁵³³ Shedding light on *how* these notions of border areas appear, Ghassem-Fachandi explicates that it is ‘the triangulation or the presence of the police post that has the effect of effacing all other distinctions... suddenly, there are only two communities, divided by a border.’⁵³⁴ Ghassem-Fachandi’s insights on Ahmedabad provide a foil, or a premise, for exploring the notion of the border in the city of Mumbai. For instance, one could begin by questioning points of convergence and divergence with respect to Mumbai and Ahmedabad. The point of this chapter is not to compare, however, but to develop the notion of borders in Mumbai with the help of current perspectives. In that vein, Ghaseem-Fachandi’s study of Ahmedabad enables us to establish that the city and the border are not entirely divorced from one another in postcolonial South Asia. This analysis of the border in the city is insightful but it remains limited since it is not the primary focus of his research.

To take the discussion of borders and the postcolonial city forward and refine our conceptual understandings, it is crucial to consider this relationship more broadly. For

⁵³¹ Anasua Chatterji, “An Address in a Ghetto,” *The Hindu Business Line*, 2017.

⁵³² Ghassem-Fachandi, *Pogrom in Gujarat: Hindu Nationalism and Anti-Muslim Violence in India*. 218

⁵³³ Ibid. 230

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

instance, outside of South Asia, the concept of the border and city have been applied in different contexts. For the case of Jos in Nigeria, Yakubu Joseph and Rainer Rothfuss explain how ideas of segregation, everyday security, and stereotypes operate in terms of bordering and othering in-groups and out-groups. Joseph and Rothfuss outline the significance of spatial perceptions in mediating the process of othering.⁵³⁵ Dwelling on the relationship between religion and urban space, Marian Burchardt and Irene Becci propose conceptualising cities ‘as the conditions and products of the process whereby these global imagined communities are re-territorialized and of the often inchoate and creative practices through which religious aspirations and urban visions are conjoined.’⁵³⁶ Scholars like Scott *et al* who work on the Roma population in Budapest suggest that ‘urban settings are laboratories that offer insights into how borders are created within society in different social, ethnic, cultural and political circumstances.’⁵³⁷ They suggest that ‘cities are themselves much more than materializations of economic relations, they can be more generally understood as products of border-making processes, composed of a mosaic of interlinked yet differentiated spaces that give a particular city its social, economic, cultural and political character.’⁵³⁸ In many ways, the city is a fertile location for the congregation of different religions, ethnicities, and languages, congregations that produce both friction and cohesion. Bringing the understanding of borders or bordering practices, understood ‘as a product of our own social practices and habitus’, to the city could prove insightful.⁵³⁹ The

⁵³⁵ Yakubu Joseph and Rainer Rothfuss, “Symbolic Bordering and the Securitization of Identity Markers in Nigeria’s Ethno-Religiously Segregated City of Jos,” in *Placing the Border in Everyday Life*, ed. Reece Jones and Corey Johnson (England: Ashgate, 2014). 172

⁵³⁶ Irene Becci and Marian Burchardt, “Introduction: Religion Takes Places,” in *Topographies of Faith: Religion In Urban Spaces*, ed. Irene Becci, Marian Burchardt, and José Casanova (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013). 15

⁵³⁷ Krisztina Keresztély, James. W Scott, and Tünde Virág, “Roma Communities, Urban Development and Social Bordering in the Inner City of Budapest,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40, no. 7: Special Issue: Racialized Bordering Discourses on European Roma (2017): 1077–95. 1081

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

⁵³⁹ van Houtum, “The Geopolitics of Borders and Boundaries.” 674

concept of the border could shed light on the multi-layered exclusions and othering that operate in the city.

In the context of Bombay/Mumbai, the problem, or more appropriately the challenge, of studying borders and difference in the city is camouflaged by Mumbai's sheen of cosmopolitanism, or what historian Rajnarayan Chandavarkar defines as 'Bombay's perennial modernities.'⁵⁴⁰ Alongside the city's visible and blatant class divisions, searching for Mumbai's ideas of borders involves grasping different and deeply entwined facets of economic, social, and political exclusion and marginality. Another challenge of delineating 'the border' in Mumbai, in its traditional sense, is the fact that Mumbai does not possess obvious signs of a 'divided city.' Unlike cities such as Nicosia, Belfast, Beirut, and Mostar – Mumbai is not bordered in the same way, such as by an international border.⁵⁴¹ There is no Green Line, peace line or 'Ligne de d'emarkation' in Mumbai. On the contrary, Bombay/Mumbai is often cited as a good example of cohabitation.⁵⁴² Given this reputation, and the fact that since the 2002 Gujarat riots, Ahmedabad has been the subject of significant academic attention in illustrating narratives of Hindu/Muslim divisions and ghettoisation,⁵⁴³ why have I chosen Mumbai? I would argue that this tussle between the

⁵⁴⁰ Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *History, Culture and the Indian City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).12

⁵⁴¹ See for example Freerk Boedeltje, Henk van Houtum, and Olivier Thomas Kramsch, "The Shadows of No Man's Land. Crossing the Border in the Divided Capital of Nicosia, Cyprus," *Geographica Helvetica, Schweizerische Zeitschrift Für Länder- Und Völkerkunde* 62, no. 1 (2007): 16–21.

Hiba Bou Akar and Mohamed Hafeda, "Narrating Beirut from Its Borderlines" (Beirut, 2011). Robert M Hayden, "Intersecting Religioscapes and Antagonistic Tolerance: Trajectories of Competition and Sharing of Religious Spaces in the Balkans," *Space and Polity* 17, no. 3 (2013): 320–34.

Colette Harris, "Violence in a Religiously Divided City: Kaduna, Nigeria—From the Shari'a Riots of 2000 to the Post-Election Clashes of 2011," *Space and Polity* 17, no. 3 (2013): 284–99.

⁵⁴² Jon Calame and Esther Charlesworth, *Divided Cities: Belfast, Beirut, Jerusalem, Mostar, and Nicosia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009). 3

⁵⁴³ See Aparajita De, "Spatialisation of Selves: Religion and Liveable Spaces among Hindus and Muslims in the Walled City of Ahmedabad, India," *City, Culture and Society* 7 (2016): 149–54. Christophe Jaffrelot and Charlotte Thomas, "Facing Ghettoisation in 'Riot-City': Old Ahmedabad and Juhapura between Victimisation and Self-Help," in *Muslims in Indian Cities: Trajectories of Marginalisation*, ed. Laurent Gayer and Christophe Jaffrelot (New Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers India, 2012), 43–81.

cosmopolitan and the communal, could also be understood in terms of what Ashis Nandy refers to as the ‘unintended city’ and the city.⁵⁴⁴ Mumbai presents an interesting case precisely because of this tension between contending narratives about belonging and exclusion in the city. This pushes us to pay closer attention to the less obvious, subtle nuances, internalised, mundane, and complex iterations of borders and ideas of borders. Moreover, it makes the task of understanding how ideas of borders are reproduced, practiced, and sustained in Mumbai more nuanced and intricate. In that vein, to tease out simply one factor as the premise upon which the spatial divisions of the city are founded is not only an oversimplification of what this thesis understands as a border, but also gives in to the binary-producing characteristic of borders.

The task of drawing out the border and ideas of border is reflected in the methodology adopted in this chapter. Unlike the previous chapter, where the location of the border is determined and traditionally mapped, here, to physically identify one border is not only difficult but counter-productive. To discern ideas of borders, or to gain insight into cognitive maps of the city is complex but not entirely impossible. In this vein, this chapter relies on an assortment of primary and secondary sources: field visits, walking-tours, semi-structured interviews, observations, as well as news reports, and existing academic literature on the subject. I draw from literature across disciplines like social and cultural anthropology, urban studies, South Asia studies, and the growing literature on Muslim marginalisation in India. Most of the literature on Muslims in Mumbai is comprehensive and exhaustive in terms of presenting ethnographies of Muslim dominated areas such as Shivaji Nagar, Mumbra, and Jogeshwari. As a result, for my own field visits I chose the suburb of Bandra to question the limits of Mumbai’s seemingly cosmopolitan and mixed

Darshini Mahadevia, “A City with Many Borders – Beyond Ghettoisation in Ahmedabad,” in *Indian Cities in Transition*, ed. Annapurna Shaw (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2007).

Pooja Susan Thomas, “Rediscovering Sarkhej: Narrating Belonging in Ahmedabad, Interventions,” *International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 19, no. 4 (2017): 706–23.

⁵⁴⁴ Ashis Nandy, “Introduction: Indian Popular Cinema as the Slum’s Eye View of Politics,” in *The Secret Politics of Our Desires: Innocence, Culpability and Indian Popular Cinema*, ed. Ashis Nandy (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 2.

demographic composition. I visited areas such as Behrampada, Dharavi, and Shastri Nagar in March and August 2015.

Bombay: colonial and postcolonial city

Before delving into notions of borders and spatial practices of exclusion in Mumbai, it is necessary to briefly contextualise the city's history. The island city of Bombay, located on the west coast of India, has undergone significant spatial, political, economic and cultural change that have expanded its limits successively from Bombay, to Greater Bombay, to Metropolitan Mumbai to create the sprawling metropolis that it is today. Historically, Bombay/Mumbai has always held a prominent position in colonial India and the postcolonial, independent Indian state. Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Bombay/Mumbai has been designated India's financial capital and modern city. In fact, Bombay claimed the title of '*urbis prima in Indis*' (first city of India) after the first major all-India census undertaken in 1872 when, with a population of 644,405, it emerged as the largest city' in the Indian sub-continent, and the second largest, after London, in the British empire.⁵⁴⁵ By the early twentieth century, Bombay was a 'dazzling mélange of communities and tongues' that 'imparted an image of openness and promise to Bombay.'⁵⁴⁶ Gyan Prakash describes colonial Bombay in the following way: 'the city teemed with industrialists, merchants, bankers, brokers, shipping agents, shopkeepers, artisans, clerks, mill hands, dockworkers, and casual laborers. The mills and dockyards hummed with activity, and the jangle of money filled the air in company offices and bazaars...Bombay became the city of gold.'⁵⁴⁷

Chandavarkar credits the emergence of cosmopolitanism and Bombay's modernity to the relationships between various social groups that inhabited the city.⁵⁴⁸ One could argue that this description still seems appropriate today. While there are many prisms through which

⁵⁴⁵ Meera Kosambi, "Commerce, Conquest and the Colonial City: Role of Locational Factors in Rise of Bombay," *Economic and Political Weekly* 20, no. 1 (1985): 32–37. 32

⁵⁴⁶ Gyan Prakash, *Mumbai Fables* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010).43

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁸ Chandavarkar, *History, Culture and the Indian City*. 15

we can analyse Bombay's history, for this chapter, let us focus on spatial politics in the city. To begin with, Bombay was a colonial city, the spatial divisions and order of which were encoded with racial dominance.⁵⁴⁹ For instance, the European population lived in the south of the city, while Indians were clustered in north of the fortified town, with the east-west line of Churchgate demarcating the boundary between the natives and foreigners.⁵⁵⁰ It is believed that these basic divisions persisted even after the fort's walls came down in 1862.⁵⁵¹ However, over time, it is argued that class lines superseded racial divisions, as rich Indian merchants and businessmen built houses in European areas. That said, no Europeans lived in the native quarters, which were crowded, mixed use neighbourhoods where Indian merchants both lived and worked.

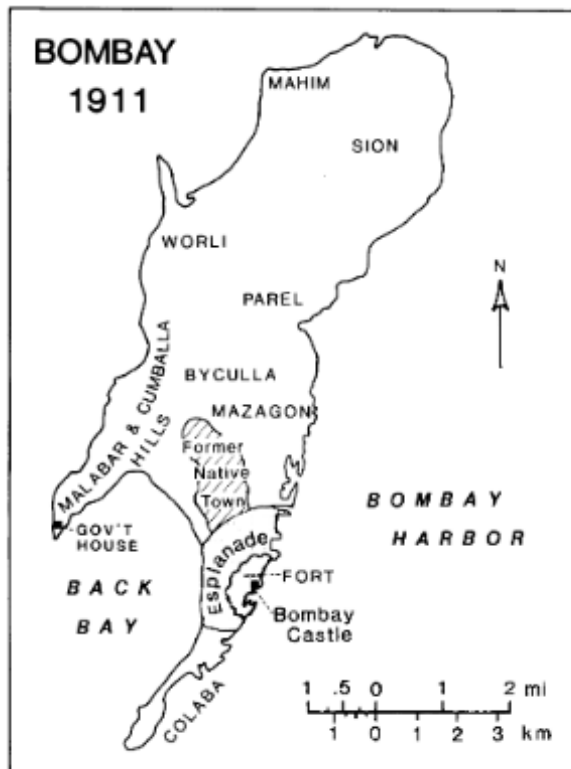


FIG. 6—Bombay 1911.

Fig. 4.1: Map of Bombay in 1911
Source: Ibid. 41

⁵⁴⁹ Prakash, *Mumbai Fables*. 61

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid. 60

⁵⁵¹ Ibid.

Historian Gyan Prakash recreates the history of Bombay through a re-reading of colonial ethnographic literature on the city. He writes that Europeans felt proud of the ‘comely city’ in the south with its gardens, bungalows and neo-Gothic public buildings, but they did not think of it as ‘exotic.’⁵⁵² On the contrary, it felt comfortingly familiar, and the British expression of wonder at Bombay’s modern urban life was reserved for the city’s Indian quarters and their ‘otherness.’⁵⁵³ Prakash claims that ‘the imperial flaneur’s eyes sees strangeness not in Bombay’s modern industrial life, but in its rich mix of communities, in the colorful tapestries of different ethnic types.’⁵⁵⁴ Owing to its location and port, Bombay remained a ‘Gateway to India’ that brought different traders, migrants, and businessmen to the city. In addition to the diversity of the city however, division and separation persisted. For instance, Prakash cites G.W Steevens, who wrote about the dramatic change in landscape as one crossed from the British to the Indian areas nearly four decades after the fort walls came down: ‘cross one street and you are suddenly plunged in the native town. In your nostrils is the smell of the East... The decoration henceforth is its people. The windows are frames for women, the streets become wedges for men.’⁵⁵⁵ This visceral sense of distinction separating the colonial and the native, in terms of smells, sights, and aesthetics is interesting to note.

Beyond the sensory experiences of distinction, Native Town was not just a construction but existed as an actual area. Kosambi and Brush suggest this distinction between Native Town and Modern Town was an expression of the social ecology of Bombay, ‘the hierarchy of political and economic power, and of spatial segregation of colonials from the indigenes.’⁵⁵⁶ Spatially, Bombay comprised of the small British minority, their close intermediaries - the Gujarati-speaking Parsis, who lived in the original fort area, in Colaba

⁵⁵² Ibid. 63

⁵⁵³ Ibid. 63

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid. 63

⁵⁵⁵ G.W Steevens, “All India in Miniature,” in *The Charm of Bombay: An Anthology of Writing in Praise of the First City in India*, ed. R.P Karkaria (Bombay, 1915), 81–84. 82-83

⁵⁵⁶ Kosambi and E. Brush, “Three Colonial Port Cities in India.” 42

cantonment, and in the suburb of Malabar Hill.⁵⁵⁷ ‘Other Gujaratis, both Hindu and Muslim, who benefited from participation in commerce and industry under British rule, lived mainly in Native Town where they were as close as legally possible to the old fort.’⁵⁵⁸ Lastly, the majority Hindu Marathi speakers were the chief source of labour in the city and resided in the least desirable dockside and interior industrial tracts or remained in the semirural northern reaches of Bombay Island.⁵⁵⁹ Despite these divisions and numerical differences, Chandavarkar claims that power relations in urban neighbourhoods were characterised by reciprocity and rarely flowed in a single direction. This, however, does not suggest that social relations in the ‘urban community’ were devoid of tensions, conflict, violence, and exploitation.⁵⁶⁰

For instance, Nile Green’s historical intervention titled *Bombay Islam* plays on the tensions between the communal and cosmopolitan narrative that was robust even in 1914. Green writes, in 1914, that one Bombay resident proudly asked his fellow citizen, ‘Is it not literally true that in modern Bombay we witness a truly cosmopolitan population in which every nationality is represented...?’⁵⁶¹ Upending the debate, Green argues that instead of conceiving the Muslim shrines in the city as catering to the religious needs of the migrant labourers and ‘tolerant’ spaces of urban harmony, these shrines express the tensions between the cosmopolitan pressures and possibilities caused by mass migration.⁵⁶² Green highlights the value of paying attention to the subtle expressions of cosmopolitan pressures

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

For a postcolonial study on the transformation of chawls see Neera Adarkar, ed., *The Chawls of Mumbai: Galleries of Life* (New Delhi: ImprintOne, 2012).

⁵⁵⁸ Kosambi and E. Brush, “Three Colonial Port Cities in India.”

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁰ Chandavarkar, *History, Culture and the Indian City*. 15

⁵⁶¹ Nile Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840-1915* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). 50

⁵⁶² Ibid.

that existed even then, the persistence of Hindu-Muslim violence and tensions- particularly during *Muharram* carnivals- challenge the celebratory literature on cosmopolitanism.⁵⁶³

In ‘developing as a colonial outpost and as a hub in the colonial exploitation of Indian resources, Bombay had acquired the façade of a European city but outside of the elite precincts, the city was in a state of squalor.’⁵⁶⁴ The mills in Bombay and the other growing industries attracted migrants, mostly men of diverse origins. The economic pull of the city also led to the creation of the *chawl*, a Marathi word meaning “room or house fronted by a corridor.”⁵⁶⁵ Over time, *chawls* became emblematic of the overcrowded working-class space in the city.⁵⁶⁶ In this sense, Bombay has always spatially reflected its economic disparities; the notion of the *chawl* may appear to precede the slum, but the parallels between their colonial descriptions are worth considering. *Chawls* too were described by colonial officials as poor, packed in dense clusters, overcrowded and poorly ventilated that ‘set between narrow lanes and open drains, stables, and warehouses.’⁵⁶⁷ Notably, Prakash argues that ‘the imperial blinders prevented the recognition that the hellish landscape was produced by the colonial economy, they could not see that the economic relations that British power imposed rendered the precarious mill industry workers in appalling conditions’ here in the colonial city.⁵⁶⁸ Prakash emphasises a key connection between the colonial city of Bombay and effects of industrialisation as responsible for the ‘wretched inhuman conditions’ in the colony.⁵⁶⁹ Although *chawls* should not be mistaken for slums, the colonial lineage of class-based spatial organisation in shaping the city’s organisation is worth noting. In the words of Prakash, ‘slums and tenements were not alien to modern

⁵⁶³ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁴ Prakash, *Mumbai Fables*. 65

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid. 65

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

Bombay but its intimate other; they held up a mirror to elite spaces, reflecting the grotesque other side of colonial and capitalist spatialization.’⁵⁷⁰

Bombay also played an important role in the freedom struggle. The Quit India Movement was launched by the All India Congress on August 8, 1942 in Gowalia Tank, Bombay. The city was active in the freedom struggle, participating in the Civil Disobedience Movement, burning British goods, protesting, and taking part in the Royal Navy Mutiny in 1946. Over time, Bombay moved from colonial to postcolonial, and the end of British rule in India and the arrival of migrants and refugees in 1947-8 led to rapid growth in the city’s population and spatial limits. Political changes not only changed the map of Bombay but also led to the linguistic divisions to create new regional states of Maharashtra and Gujarat in 1960. Postcolonial Bombay became the city of Indian cinema, art, and culture, as well as witnessing growing protests for working-class rights and labour unions. In the 1970s, a satellite city was created outside of the city called Navi Bombay or New Bombay. In the 1980s, the mills were closed, the *chawl* system transformed and the identity of Bombay as India’s textile capital changed.

Since the turn of the 21st century, Bombay’s iconic mills have been torn down to make way for skyscrapers, shopping malls, luxurious homes, and gated communities. Globalisation has hit the city hard, as unrelenting economic growth and over-crowding has led to more slums and informal housing. If communities have chosen to live separately based on religious and cultural identities, then economic and other relations also ensured that contact between communities has been maintained. Throughout Bombay’s history, there has been spatial segregation but the city has not necessarily been as divided as one might expect. For instance, Chandavarkar notes: ‘Indian society was too complex and too turbulent to be managed from afar.... Segregation in India remained more a conceptual than a physical reality...fervently imagined and even more ineffectually maintained.’⁵⁷¹ In that

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid. 66

⁵⁷¹ Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance and the State in India, C. 1850–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). 241, 242

sense, even as one takes a long view of the city's colonial history, the issue of segregation and spatial organisation in the city is complex and representative of distance but also contact, modernity, and a form of cosmopolitanism. Mumbai's history indicates that while the city has attracted and hosted diverse ethnic, religious, linguistic groups, its economy has ensured that contact between these communities has continued.

Although narratives of colonial and post-colonial Bombay/Mumbai have oscillated between cosmopolitan and communal, I would argue that they have largely remained similar.⁵⁷² Historically, from the Portuguese to the British, Jews, Muslims, Parsis and Christians, Mumbai has been a city of 'outsiders' from the start.⁵⁷³ The underlying issue that seems chafe, is perhaps a far deeper, more philosophical question that is outside the remit of this study, but questions the meaning of Bombay/Mumbai's cosmopolitanism. In the past, scholars seemed perplexed by the persistence of communal violence in the city despite its cosmopolitan and composite nature. It is important to remember that communal violence, or 'religion inspired violence', is not specifically a postcolonial urban phenomena, as many scholars who study urban space, religion, and violence may seem to have suggested.⁵⁷⁴ On the contrary, colonial Bombay witnessed several spates of communal violence and riots.⁵⁷⁵ In light of this, one ought to remain careful in drawing a genealogical link between Partition and urban violence in India, or pre-Partition riots and contemporary urban riots.⁵⁷⁶ Moreover, the notion that riots or communal violence interpreted as 'just

⁵⁷² Colin McFarlane, "Postcolonial Bombay: Decline of a Cosmopolitanism City?," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26 (2008): 480–99.

⁵⁷³ Arjun Appadurai, "Cosmopolitanism from Below: Some Ethical Lessons from the Slums of Mumbai," in *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition*, vol. 4 (London and New York: Verso, 2013). 201

⁵⁷⁴ Liam O'Dowd and Martina McKnight, "Religion, Violence and Cities: An Introduction," *Space and Polity* 17, no. 3 (2013): 261–69.

Ravinder Kaur, ed., *Religion, Violence and Political Mobilisation in South Asia* (New Delhi and London: Sage Publications, 2006). 23

⁵⁷⁵ Meena Menon, "Chronicle of Communal Riots in Bombay Presidency (1893-1945)," *Economic and Political Weekly* 45, no. 47 (2010): 63–72.

⁵⁷⁶ For example, this is a common link that many scholars seem to draw but I am wary of making the same connection because I am afraid that this could pose the risk of rendering the problem of religion and politics or ethno-nationalist politics as 'Third World Problems' or South Asia specific.

another example of primordial conflict' between Hindus/Muslims has not only existed throughout history but is simplistic and a binary producing explanation that one must avoid.⁵⁷⁷ Eschewing these assumptions, the next section will discuss the Bombay Riots with the intention to illustrate how the border narrative emerged in the city and not fix the idea of borders in the city.

The Bombay Riots: Interpretations and Implications

The first riot in Bombay occurred on August 11, 1893, when a Muslim congregation emerged from Friday noon prayers in Bombay's Jama Masjid and rushed towards a nearby Hindu temple. Clashes between crowds and stone throwing made this the bloodiest riot in the history of nineteenth-century Bombay.⁵⁷⁸ After these riots, tensions and communal violence persisted, and were largely interpreted as a 'public order problem' that needed to be managed, causing a shift in colonial policing strategies.⁵⁷⁹ Since then, the occurrence of riots, whether Hindu-Muslim, or Sunnis-Shi'a, Muslim-Parsi were not altogether foreign to the colonial city.⁵⁸⁰ In the city's recent history, however, the 1992-93 Bombay riots marked an important turning point and played a significant role in shaping contemporary Mumbai. The Bombay riots were viewed as a response to the demolition of Babri Masjid, an ancient mosque in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh (North India) by Hindu extremists on December 6, 1992.⁵⁸¹ The mosque, a sacred religious space for Muslims, was built by the

The other layer to this problem is the colonial angle of communalism and its postcolonial continuities. For example, Gyanendra Pandey argues against the exceptionalism of the riot in Gyanendra Pandey, "In Defense of the Fragment: Writing about Hindu-Muslim Riots in India Today," *Representations* 37, no. Special Issue: Imperial Fantasies and Postcolonial Histories (1992): 27–55.

⁵⁷⁷ Reece Jones, "Sacred Cows and Thumping Drums: Claiming Territory as 'Zones of Tradition' in British India," *Area* 39, no. 1 (2007): 55–65. 55

⁵⁷⁸ Prashant Kidambi, *The Making of an Indian Metropolis: Colonial Governance and Public Culture in Bombay 1890-1920* (England & USA: Ashgate, 2007). 115

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid. 155

⁵⁸⁰ Menon, "Chronicle of Communal Riots in Bombay Presidency (1893-1945)." Specifically see chapter 2: Cow Protection, temple and mosque disputes go way back: A chronicle of communal riots in Bombay city.

⁵⁸¹ For a detailed political and philosophical enquiry on the Babri masjid demolition see Ashis Nandy et al., *The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and the Fear of the Self* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press India, 1995).

Mughal Emperor Babar in 1562. The location of the mosque was contested as the *Ramjanmabhoomi*, or birthplace of Hindu God Ram by fractions of the Sangh Parivar, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).⁵⁸² This sacred spatial contestation in Ayodhya had violent repercussions across India. Riots erupted across the country. Arjun Appadurai argues that the demolition Babri Masjid heralded a turning point in Indian political history, a ‘big effort to Hinduise India and to link local ethnopolitics and national xenophobia.’⁵⁸³

As a reaction to this demolition, Bombay witnessed waves of riots in the months of December 1992 and January 1993. Chatterji and Mehta classify the occurrence of the riots in two distinct phases, the first starting on December 7, 1992, lasting about a week, and the outcome of Muslim anger over the demolition of the Mosque. The second began in early January, and continued for about three weeks, was the outcome of a Hindu backlash aided by the police force.⁵⁸⁴ They contend that ‘while the violence of December 1992 was spontaneous, that of January 1993, was orchestrated and planned, the result of political machination.’⁵⁸⁵ This outlook is buttressed by the subsequent government-led Srikrishna Commission Report that revealed that majority of the people killed during the riots were Muslim. The report went on to suggest that this was also an outcome of police bias favouring Hindus.⁵⁸⁶ In response to this, on March 12, 1993, there were a series of twelve

⁵⁸² The Bharatiya Janata Party is a right-wing Hindu nationalist party that bases its ideology on Hindutva. This ideology centres on Hindu beliefs as a way of life. It also believes India is primarily for Hindus. The current Prime Minister of India Mr Narendra Modi belongs to the BJP too. The BJP won the largest majority in the General Elections of 2014.

⁵⁸³ Arjun Appadurai, “Spectral Housing and Urban Cleansing: Notes on Millennial Mumbai,” *Public Culture* 12, no. 3 (2000): 627–51. 645

⁵⁸⁴ Roma Chatterji and Deepak Mehta, *Living with Violence: An Anthropology of Events and Everyday Life* (New Delhi and Oxon: Routledge, 2007). 3

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 3

⁵⁸⁶ The Srikrishna Commission Report suggests that the Mumbai’s Police Commissioner at the time, S K Bapat revealed in his extended testimony his utter disdain and contempt for Muslims, his belief that the BJP and Shiv Sena were non-communal parties. Moreover, the setting up of the *Mohalla* Committees by Julio Ribeiro and others to re-instill faith of the Mumbai’s Muslims in the police is demonstrative of this bias.

bomb blasts orchestrated by Bombay's Muslim don Dawood Ibrahim.⁵⁸⁷ During the riots, the social fabric of the city disintegrated. In the words of Kalpana Sharma, 'the riots were considered a watershed in Bombay's contemporary history because they symbolized, in some way, the demise of the city's "cosmopolitanism."'⁵⁸⁸

⁵⁸⁷ Meena Menon, *Riots and After in Mumbai: Chronicles of Truth and Reconciliation* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2012).14

⁵⁸⁸ Kalpana Sharma, "1995 Chronicle of a Riot Foretold," in *In Bombay: Metaphor for Modern India*, ed. Patel Patel and Alice Thorner (Bombay: Oxford University Press India, 2005). 269

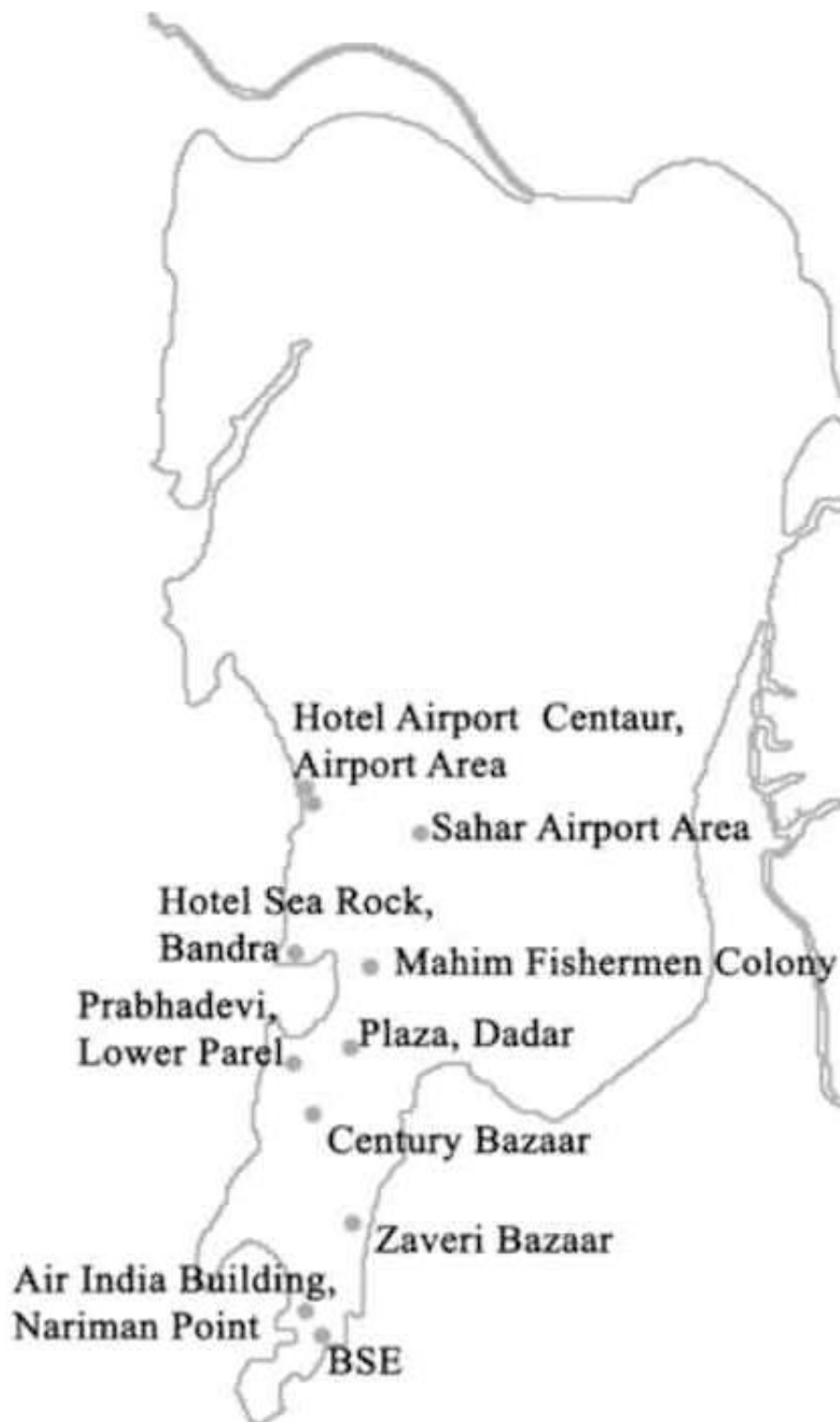


Fig. 4.2: Map of bomb-blasts in 1993
Source: Mumbai City Profile p.37

Rumours of violence between Hindus and Muslims in slums spawned more retaliation and violence. Radha Subramanian notes that rumours redrew the boundaries between known and unknown and overturned routine understandings of what is plausible and what is improbable.⁵⁸⁹ For instance, rumours like: the dead bodies of Hindus were strewn in the alleys; that a mosque had been attacked; that people from the Muslim *basti* of Behrampada had beheaded the idol of Ganesh at a local shrine; and that Bal Thackeray, head of the Shiv Sena party, had been arrested.⁵⁹⁰ These rumours became a basis for justifying retaliatory violence. Historian Jim Masselos asserts that ‘the riots that broke out in Bombay in January 1993, were the worst the city had experienced since the virtual civil war that surrounded independence in 1947 and the partitioning of India and Pakistan.’⁵⁹¹ Masselos states that ‘slum dwellers went out and attacked middle class dwellings, middle class people defended themselves and attacked others, slum dwellers attacked high rise apartments and demanded that Muslims be produced for killing, middle-class Hindus went out on a pogrom against Muslims burning shops and houses, killing and injuring.’⁵⁹² While there was a disappearance of b/order, there was also a sense of Hindus going into Muslim dominated areas looking for trouble, and vice versa. In these ways, the ensuing violence of the riots crossed certain unspoken physical and metaphorical lines in the city.⁵⁹³

Although there were cases of families protecting and helping victims, people also found themselves under attack by their neighbours, as years of relations broke down -- ‘our children used to play together. We used to visit them during their *pujas* (Hindu prayers)

⁵⁸⁹ Radhika Subramaniam, “Culture of Suspicion: Riots and Rumor in Bombay, 1992-1993,” *Transforming Anthropology* 8, no. 1-2 (1999): 97-110. 103

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid. 102-3

⁵⁹¹ Jim Masselos, “Postmodern Bombay: Fractured Discourses,” in *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*, ed. Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson (USA and UK: Blackwell Publishing, 1995), 199-216. 199

⁵⁹² Ibid. 213

⁵⁹³ The Radhabai Chawl in Jogeshwari incident was widely described as the ‘last straw’ which provoked Hindus all over the city to retaliate was when six Hindus were burnt alive on the night of 7-8 January 1993, five of them women. However, Jyoti Punwani points out incidences like Ansari Bagh, when Ibrahim Ansari kept the mob at bay for three and a half hours with his revolver and gun despite the police ignoring his calls for help which have been forgotten from the discourse on the riots. While cases of Muslim brutality are remembered cases like Ansari Bagh of Hindu brutality as well as police bias are forgotten, thereby also highlighting the politics of memory.

and they would come over for *Id*.⁵⁹⁴ Waves of riot-refugees from within Bombay left their homes and boarded trains that took them back to their hometowns. The riots revealed the ‘fragility of all those tacit assumptions, those accepted and unarticulated norms about the nature of urban living, which enable a city to function, fundamentally, the idea of a city as a site for social interaction, for joint habitation and shared space for work, living and relaxation, no longer applied to Bombay.’⁵⁹⁵ The idea of Bombay as a city that welcomed migrants and as a city of opportunity was overridden by communal difference. Old outsiders were forced to leave as new outsiders were created. For instance, Naseem Bano and Durgavati from Uttar Pradesh left Bombay when mobs came for them shouting ‘*Bombay hamari hai, bhago bhago*’ (Bombay is ours: destroy, destroy).⁵⁹⁶ These verbal and spatial forms of exclusion posed the question: whose city?

It is critical to examine the Bombay riots for two reasons. First, because the riots were spatial, as all outbreaks took the form of a fight for territory and control of the peripheries of localities. Spatial contestation included *maha artis*,⁵⁹⁷ organised by the Shiv Sena. For instance, when Muslims congregated together for their Friday afternoon prayers, owing to the lack of space, they spilled out of the mosques and onto the congested streets. The practice of *namaz* reinforced the rallying agenda of the Sena that Muslims were ‘taking over the city’ by using *namaz* as an indicator of what was happening to the spatial organisation of the city.⁵⁹⁸ To counteract this, Thackeray directed that Hindus should perform a *maha arti*, or religious worship, each night outside a specified temple, and by doing so they would block traffic just as Muslims did during the Friday *namaaz*.⁵⁹⁹ Such tactics of “claiming” or “dominating” spaces was a manifestation of these pronounced

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid. 213

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid. 200

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid. 213

⁵⁹⁷ *Maha artis* are big Hindu prayer meetings like devotional performances with religious songs

⁵⁹⁸ Jim Masselos, “The Bombay Riots of January 1993: The Politics of Urban Conflagration,” *Journal of South Asian Studies* 17, no. 1 (1994): 79–95. 85

⁵⁹⁹ Namaaz is the prayer practiced five times a day by Muslims

communal lines.⁶⁰⁰ Moreover, the Shiva Sena⁶⁰¹ mobilised a national geography by spreading the rumour that the Pakistani navy was about to attack Mumbai from its shoreline on the Arabian Sea, and anxious Hindu residents turned searchlights onto the ocean to spot Pakistani warships.⁶⁰² Within Bombay, Muslims were literally hunted down with lists of names in the hands of Hindu mobs; they were cornered in slums and middle-class areas. There was a strange point of conjuncture between these violent efforts to create Hindu public spheres and spaces, to spatially clear Muslim flats and neighbourhoods, and to destroy Muslim bodies and properties.⁶⁰³

Second, during the riots, Indian Muslims were often depicted as undercover Pakistanis, that is to say, as invaders, strangers, and traitors. Blurring the line between the Indian Muslim and Pakistani also marked the spatiality of the violence. The precarity of the Indian Muslim citizen who is easily interchanged as Pakistani not only denationalises the Indian-Muslim in cultural-nationalist discourse but also places the Indian Muslim in a position of proving her/his loyalty towards India.⁶⁰⁴ In these ways, the historical Indo-Pakistan enmity is inscribed into neighbourhood and individual relationships. The border vocabulary appeared pervasive in accounts of the riot violence. For instance, Muhammad a resident of the Dharavi slum explains how the border logic worked during the riots. He explains how the local drain became the India–Pakistan border, imagined by the rival communities in the following way: ‘See, it’s like this. Some of our boys created a diversion by attacking from one side, while the others put out the fire. If we put out one fire, another would start, but

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁰¹ Shiv Sena translates, as the army of Shivaji, named after a Maratha warrior, is far right regional political party founded in 1966 by Bal Thackeray, a political cartoonist in Mumbai. The party’s ideology is based on Marathi nationalism and Hindutva, beliefs. The party is infamous for its anti-migrant, anti-Pakistani views, vandalism and violence. The party was in power in Maharashtra from 1994 to 1999. As Arjun Appadurai notes ‘its platform combines language chauvinism (Marathi), regional primordialism (a cult of the regional state of Maharashtra), and a commitment to a Hinduized India (Hindutva, the land of Hinduness).

⁶⁰² Appadurai, “Spectral Housing and Urban Cleansing: Notes on Millennial Mumbai.” 646

⁶⁰³ Ibid. 648

⁶⁰⁴ Abdul Shaban, “Ethnic Politics, Muslims and Space in Contemporary Mumbai,” in *Lives of Muslims in India: Politics, Exclusion and Violence*, ed. Abdul Shaban (New Delhi and London: Routledge India, 2012). 215

we made sure that it did not spread beyond the border. This drain [Joglekar *nullah*] that runs around Mukund Nagar was called the India–Pakistan border.’⁶⁰⁵ Relatedly, Shamim, a Muslim resident of Dharavi, one of the largest slum’s in Asia, shares that he lived near a *maidan* (open space), where dye workers (largely Muslims) used to work. He fears venturing into the public space and says: ‘They (Muslim workers) all left. Service people, all Maharashtrians, have taken their place. For them, it’s an extra source of income but they don’t know anything . . . During the *danga* (riots), Muslims were brought here and stripped. Even now, I find it difficult to talk about what they did. The *maidan* was called . . . the parliament of Pakistan. Now, it’s a public latrine. [They] thrashed and kicked on our genitals. Whatever you can imagine, I can only say it was worse.’⁶⁰⁶ During the riots it was not uncommon for Hindu men to check for whether men were Muslim by forcing their trousers down.⁶⁰⁷ Faisal Devji identifies ‘this anxiety to fix Muslimhood on the body’ as a form of racism, adding that ‘racism is when life hangs on the foreskin.’⁶⁰⁸ In these ways, the riots were not just about demarcating between Hindu and Muslim areas of the city, but also about demarcating bodies through symbols and religious practices.

Reflecting on the border-logics, Sarvate, a Dalit Hindu Maharashtrian,⁶⁰⁹ explains how his neighbourhood was known as the Hindustan–Pakistan border, where a wall divided Hindustan and Pakistan.⁶¹⁰ He adds, ‘Yes, but there was a wall that separated us from them. We called it the peace line [*shanti rekha*]. It was the ‘line of control. They wouldn’t come here, and we would not go there. If they did, they would be warned. The *danga* (riot) taught them a lesson.’⁶¹¹ Dalits, previously referred to as untouchables, form the base of the caste hierarchy among Hindus and are also considered inferior by Muslims, hence positioning them ‘in-between’ Hindus and Muslims during violence. This in-betweenness could be

⁶⁰⁵ Chatterji and Mehta, *Living with Violence: An Anthropology of Events and Everyday Life*. 111

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid. 110

⁶⁰⁷ See Deepak Mehta, “Collective Violence, Public Spaces, and the Unmaking of Men,” *Men and Masculinities* 9, no. 2 (2006): 204–25.

⁶⁰⁸ Faisal Fatehali Devji, “Hindu/Muslim/Indian,” *Public Culture* 5, no. 1 (1992): 1–18. 12

⁶⁰⁹ Dalit is conscious choice of self-reference resulting from the political movement (Anupama Rao 2010)

⁶¹⁰ Chatterji and Mehta, *Living with Violence: An Anthropology of Events and Everyday Life*. 112

⁶¹¹ Ibid.

interpreted as forming a ‘no-man’s land’ or a buffer-zone like those at the borders between India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh discussed in the previous chapter. Ali Anwar says that while Dalits are called *asprishya* (untouchable) in Hindu society, they are called *arzal* (inferior) among the Muslims.⁶¹² In this way, during the riots, everyday spaces were transformed into imaginations of India-Pakistan using narratives and practices associated with the border to smudge the boundaries between the urban/international/local. The image of the territorial border of India–Pakistan is metaphorically brought up to divide the neighbourhoods of the city and bodies of the groups of people who are viewed as ‘alien’ or ‘others’ or ‘Pakistanis.’⁶¹³ The narrative and the border-logic of India and Pakistan seemed to emerge in the narratives prominent during and the memories recalled after the Bombay Riots.

While there always existed ‘Hindu areas’ and ‘Muslim areas’ in the city, the previously Muslim or Hindu dominated areas became dangerously pronounced as the riots deepened pre-existing communal divisions.⁶¹⁴ The creation of exterior categories, inclusions and exclusions, Indians as Hindus, and Indianness as Hinduness or *Hindutva*⁶¹⁵ as well as the parallel notions of Muslims as outsiders or less-Indian, potential Pakistanis, sowed the seeds for a major change in the city’s history and social geography.⁶¹⁶ Most remarkably, the riots violently rewrote ‘urban space as sacred, national, and Hindu space.’⁶¹⁷ The nationalist imaginary of India, or the anthropomorphic distortion of Mother India as a sacred nation, was violently brought to the city. It inscribed an invisible, fractured, and layered delineation that lives on through memory and is upheld even today. In the words of Appadurai, the riots brought ‘the political geography of sovereignty, focused on border

⁶¹² Soutik Biswas, “Why Are Many Indian Muslims Seen as Untouchable?,” *BBC*, May 10, 2016. (Accessed June 22, 2017)

⁶¹³ Shaban, “Ethnic Politics, Muslims and Space in Contemporary Mumbai.”

⁶¹⁴ Jyoti Punwani, “‘My Area, Your Area’: How Riots Changed the City,” in *Bombay and Mumbai: The City in Transition*, ed. Sujata Patel and Jim Masselos (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005). 238

⁶¹⁵ *Hindutva* is an ideology that was espoused by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar that seeks to establish the hegemony of Hindus or the Hindu way of life.

⁶¹⁶ Masselos, “Postmodern Bombay: Fractured Discourses.” 200

⁶¹⁷ Appadurai, “Spectral Housing and Urban Cleansing: Notes on Millennial Mumbai.” 630

wars with Pakistan to the same emotional space as the political geography of cultural purity, focused on the deep archaeology of religious monuments.’⁶¹⁸

Bombay to Mumbai: Identity and Belonging

Much of the literature suggests the ghettoisation of Muslims was an effect of the violence of the 1992-93 riots. Scholars like Mustansir Dalvi argue that even now, twenty years later, Mumbai is marked by ‘landscapes of exclusion and mindscapes of denial.’⁶¹⁹ The riots hardened the city’s stereotypes. The idea that Muslims are ‘dirty’, ‘criminals’, or ‘dangerous’ has been normalised and unquestioned. In the literature, news, and public discourse, Muslim-dominated ghettos or enclaves are pejoratively referred to as *chhota* or mini-Pakistans.⁶²⁰ An illustration of the prevalence of this notion is a story from 2009, when a ten-year-old boy accidentally entered Mumbai’s airport compound from the nearby Muslim-dominated slum of Jari Mari. He was apprehended by the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), and when they asked where he was from, the boy kept repeating that he was from Pakistan. Confused, one CRPF official said, ‘He seemed mentally unstable and kept saying that he is from Pakistan.’⁶²¹ While this may appear to be no more than a peculiar anecdote, it highlights the extent to which the notion of the Muslim stranger *as* Pakistani is internalised, even by a ten-year-old. The conflation of Muslim with Pakistani and the spatial marginalisation of Muslims into mini-Pakistans demonstrate the connections between the production of the nation-state in urban space and its internalisation by citizens.

While the tendency to view the Mumbai riots in conjunction with the marginalisation of Muslims is a recent move, riots in India and South Asia more generally have been analysed

⁶¹⁸ Ibid. 646.

⁶¹⁹ Mustansir Dalvi, “Mumbai Two Decades After: Landscapes of Exclusion and Mindscapes of Denial,” *Economics and Political Weekly* 48, no. 7 (2013).

⁶²⁰ For instance, the article ‘Mini-Pakistan set up in Kurla, Mumbai’ complains about the deliberate use of loudspeakers and sounding off the Muslim call to prayer as harassing the Hindus in the neighbourhood. August 31, 2015

“‘Mini Pakistan’ Being Set up at Kurla, Mumbai,” *Hindu Janajagruti Samiti*, 2015.

“Flush out Mini-Pakistan in India –Sena,” *Daily News and Analysis (DNA)*, December 3, 2008. (Accessed August 14, 2017)

⁶²¹ Shaban, “Ethnic Politics, Muslims and Space in Contemporary Mumbai.” 219

through the prism of what is also referred to as ethno-nationalist conflicts and collective violence. In that sense, the Bombay Riots have been filed as another part of the grander history of Hindu-Muslim or ‘communal’ violence in India. Several scholars have provided different explanations for riots ranging from the colonial legacy, the peculiarity of religion and religious identity in South Asia, to the politics of appeasement or vote-bank politics, and so on.⁶²² More specifically however, the effect of the riots has led the two conceptual strands of writing on Muslims in urban India, and more generally Muslims marginalisation that is explored through the nexus of violence and insecurity, exclusion and marginalisation.⁶²³ It is crucial to emphasise that while these economic, social, and political factors are intertwined, this chapter is focussed on the spatial manifestation of this socio-political marginality. Radhika Gupta, in her article ‘There must be some way out of here: Beyond a spatial conception of Muslim ghettoisation in Mumbai,’ reflects on her fieldwork to suggest that the ‘ghetto effect’ is often co-produced by the researcher and informant through subconscious mutual application of deeply internalised stereotypes of the other that take on edginess in the context of Mumbai.⁶²⁴ One ought to remain wary of reproducing this narrative.

These treatments of Muslims in urban India highlighting exclusion and marginalisation share a common conceptualisation of the ghetto as a space. Moreover, the materialisation of the ghetto or voluntary ghettoisation as a key consequence of the riots spurred attempts to understand the ghetto as a site in more contemporary and conceptual terms. Manish Jha

⁶²² Stanley J. Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

Paul Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (Seattle: Washington University Press, 2003).

Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

Mushirul Hasan and Asim Roy, eds., *Living Together Separately: Cultural India in History and Politics* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Pandey, “In Defense of the Fragment: Writing about Hindu-Muslim Riots in India Today.”

Devji, “Hindu/Muslim/Indian.”

⁶²³ See Raphael Susewind, “What’s in a Name? Probabilistic Inference of Religious Community from South Asian Names,” *Field Methods* 27, no. 4 (2015): 319–32.

⁶²⁴ Radhika Gupta, “There Must Be Some Way out of Here: Beyond a Spatial Conception of Muslim Ghettoization in Mumbai?,” *Ethnography* 16, no. 3 (2015): 352–70. 368

and PK Shajahan analyse these spaces through the lens of power and resistance when they argue that ‘even though the visibility of these squatter settlements is constantly sought to be erased by moving them elsewhere, by bulldozing them and by evicting the inhabitants, squatter settlements are spatial forms that make assertions, which contest domination relations, and which make the dialectic between the forces of domination and those of resistance starkly visible in a way no other medium can do.’⁶²⁵ In this respect, the production of space, even Muslim-dominated spaces, is an inherently political process, and it is symbolic of both power and resistance to symbols of power.⁶²⁶ The following section appraises the role of the ghetto in contemporary politics: in what ways are ghettos still shaped by the violence two decades on?

Bombay became Mumbai in 1995 when the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance came to power. Its renaming can be understood as a nationwide act of returning to regional names and an erasure of colonial remnants. Rashmi Varma claims that the ‘transmutation of Bombay into Mumbai’ illustrates ‘a contradictory articulation in which the globalization of capital confronts the provincialization of citizens within the postcolonial state.’⁶²⁷ Appadurai argues that the move looks backward and forward simultaneously. Looking backward, it imagines the deity *Mumba Devi* (a goddess of one of the shrines that was vital to the fishing islands that later became Bombay).⁶²⁸ It evokes the fishing folk of these islands and, because it is the name that was always used by Marathi speakers, it privileges their everyday usage over the many other vernacular renditions of the name (such as the “Bambai” favored by Hindi speakers and the “Bambaai” of Tamil speakers).⁶²⁹ Simultaneously, it gains respectability as an erasure of the Anglophone name, Bombay, and thus carries the superficial decency of popular nationalism after 1947.⁶³⁰ However,

⁶²⁵ Manish K Jha, P.K Shajahan, and Mouleshri Vyas, “Biopolitics and Urban Governmentality,” in *The Biopolitics of Development: Reading Michel Foucault in the Postcolonial Present*, ed. Sandro Mezzadra, Julian Reid, and Ranabir Samaddar (New Delhi: Springer, 2014). 52

⁶²⁶ Ibid.

⁶²⁷ Rashmi Varma, “Provincializing the Global City: From Bombay to Mumbai,” *Social Text* 22, no. 4 (2004): 65–89. 83

⁶²⁸ Appadurai, “Spectral Housing and Urban Cleansing: Notes on Millennial Mumbai.” 644

⁶²⁹ Ibid. 644

⁶³⁰ Ibid.

Appadurai cautions us to 'the subtext that looks to the future, to a counter-Bombay or anti-Bombay, as imagined by the Shiva Sena, whose political fortunes in the city wax and wane but whose *gunda* or goon politics of fear cannot be denied.'⁶³¹ Although the change from Bombay to Mumbai privileges the vernacular over the colonial, the vernacular rendition bears stains of a violent and divisive politics that favours the local over the strange outsider.

This change also signals a future for Mumbai where Marathi and Maharashtrian heroes and practices dominate urban culture, Appadurai claims it is a future that envisions Mumbai as a point of translation and mediation between a renascent Maharashtra and a re-Hinduised sacred national space of India.⁶³² It also repositions the answer to the question of whose Mumbai. Thomas Blom Hansen views Mumbai and the rise of identity politics through the lens of the politics of re/naming. Hansen notes that Mumbai was no Bombay.⁶³³ He subscribes to Zizek's argument that 'the identity of an object is the *retroactive effect of naming itself*: it is the name itself, the signifier, which supports the identity of an object.'⁶³⁴ In other words, the act of renaming and its constant reiteration stabilises the properties of a place, a group, or a nation.⁶³⁵ The difference between the meaning and representations of Bombay and Mumbai reflects the simmering tensions of belonging, identity, inclusion/exclusions. Therefore, the politics of naming was crucial to notions of belonging and legitimacy, as it underlined the assertion of a certain kind of power in the city, a certain ownership of the city, and an invisible border drawn between the city's insiders and outsiders. The renaming of the city had spatial manifestations as it was coupled with the claiming of spaces or marking of territory by the then BJP-Shiv Sena alliance. Once in

⁶³¹ Ibid.

⁶³² Ibid.

⁶³³ Interestingly though, Arjun Appadurai argues 'in retrospect, 1956 marks a moment when Bombay became Mumbai, the name now insisted on by the official machineries of the city, all of which have been influenced by the Shiva Sena'. He argues so because he accredits this change to the rise of the Shiva Sena's that goes back at least to 1956, shortly before Bombay was made the capital of the new linguistic state of Maharashtra and after intense rioting in Bombay over the competing claims of Gujaratis for Bombay to be in their own new linguistic state. Ibid.

⁶³⁴ Thomas Blom Hansen, *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Postcolonial Bombay* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001). 2

⁶³⁵ Ibid. 2

power, spatial tactics through democratic processes/institutions transformed several other of Mumbai's landmarks by renaming them after Chhatrapati Shivaji,⁶³⁶ like the new airport and central railway station.⁶³⁷ Public space underwent a transformation as government offices, lanes, streets, parks, and even traffic islands across the city were marked by grand statues of Shivaji decorated with forked saffron flags.⁶³⁸

After the riots, Mumbai underwent what Appadurai and Masselos refer to as a “cleansing” or “spatial purification”, characterised by the expulsion of Muslim bodies from the centre of the city to the outskirts.⁶³⁹ This was equally a voluntary, self-imposed moving out and an institutionalised removal. Communal violence altered Mumbai's urban spaces tremendously, giving rise to the notion of ‘communally sensitive’ slums/spaces. Communally sensitive areas can be explained in two ways: where Hindus and Muslims mix or where either Hindus or Muslims seem dominant.⁶⁴⁰ Anti-minority violence, Ravinder Kaur notes, ‘does not just keep the traditional community boundaries in place; rather it pushes these boundaries further afar.’⁶⁴¹ Thus ‘physical violence becomes both the occasion and agency for purifying entire *mohallas*, or neighbourhoods, of the polluting “Other”... where undesirable elements – members of the “other” community, their property and places of worship - are removed and boxed into ghetto-like locations.’⁶⁴² This is precisely what happened in parts of Mumbai, as many Muslims did not return to their homes because they no longer felt safe in their Hindu-dominated neighbourhoods and left for the outskirts of the city. Seeking safety in numbers, many slums like Shivaji Nagar,

⁶³⁶ Chhatrapati Shivaji is the Hindu Maratha warrior king and icon of the Shiv Sena from the 17th Century. Shivaji was from the Bhosle Maratha clan and based in Raigad, Maharashtra and had never historically been to or engaged with Bombay.

⁶³⁷ Laurent Gayer and Christophe Jaffrelot, eds., *Muslims In Indian Cities: Trajectories Of Marginalisation* (New Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers India, 2012). 26.

⁶³⁸ Ibid.26.

⁶³⁹ Amita Bhidé, “The City Produced: Urban Development, Violence and Spatial Justice in Mumbai” (Mumbai, 2012). 64

⁶⁴⁰ Ghassem-Fachandi, *Pogrom in Gujarat: Hindu Nationalism and Anti-Muslim Violence in India*. 231

⁶⁴¹ Quoted in Sameera Khan, “Negotiating the Mohalla: Exclusion, Identity and Muslim Women in Mumbai,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no. 17 (2007): 1527–33.1528 (original unavailable online)

⁶⁴² Ibid.1530.

Mumbra, Jogeshwari, Behrampada saw an influx of Muslims. The riots created new spatial social boundaries that linked communal identities, defined through a mode of naming at the intersection of religious identity, nationality, and even personal identity.

Many ghettos emerged in the city, like Shivaji Nagar in Chembur and Behrampada in Bandra East. Qudsiya Contractor's ethnographic study of the Shivaji Nagar slum in Mumbai's outskirts close to the city's garbage dump demonstrates how being a Muslim slum dweller in Mumbai has not just become 'a socio-economic disadvantage but can also end up as a precursor to peripheral living in a city that was once the panacea to urban aspirations.'⁶⁴³ She draws a hard-hitting comparison between 'garbage dump and human dump' to refer to the way in which people in these communities felt, as though they were being picked up from the city and thrown here (*laa ke daala*) when the government decided to move the 'dirty business' - *katal khanas* or slaughterhouses- to the margins of the city.⁶⁴⁴ Marginalisation operates by stigmatising people and forcing them into spaces outside the city. The common stigma now associated with many Muslims in the city reverberates through her findings. For instance, Ramzaanji, when interviewed by Contractor, stated: 'our crime is that we are Muslims (*Hum logon ka jurm yeh hai ki hum Musalman hain*). It is the way we are looked at. We are being pushed behind.'⁶⁴⁵ As well as victimisation and stigmatisation, the feeling of being spatially pushed behind through everyday practices makes matters worse. For example, Kirti Singh, an English teacher at a private English-medium school run by a Shi'a Trust, suggests that '[i]t is not because they [Muslims of

⁶⁴³ Qudsiya Contractor, "'Unwanted in My City': The Making of a 'Muslim Slum' in Mumbai," in *Muslims in Indian Cities: Trajectories of Marginalisation*, ed. Laurent Gayer and Christophe Jaffrelot (New Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers India, 2012), 23–42. 23

Interestingly, the practice of relocating or closing illegal slaughter houses is not random but measured and would appear as a common practice among the BJP. For instance, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi was Chief Minister of Gujarat, illegal slaughter houses were shut. Ghassem-Fachandi, *Pogrom in Gujarat: Hindu Nationalism and Anti-Muslim Violence in India*. Similarly, when BJP's Yogi Adityanath became Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh in 2017, one of his early policies was to shut illegal slaughter houses.

Gulam Jeelani, "Job Loss Fear Looms High over UP's Slaughterhouse Where Hindus Outnumber Muslims," *Hindustan Times*, April 3, 2017. (Accessed August 15, 2017)

⁶⁴⁴ Contractor, "'Unwanted in My City': The Making of a 'Muslim Slum' in Mumbai." 28

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid. 23

Shivaji Nagar] are not interested in upward social mobility or because of their lack of commitment, that is really not the problem or that of capability. The problem is that it [Shivaji Nagar] is like a *walled city*. It is a huge area. And they rarely get a chance to go outside.’⁶⁴⁶ In addition to *feeling* othered by embodiment, the idea of being physically removed owing to this embodiment is synergetic and mutually reinforcing. By being “pushed out”, the borders of the metropolitan city of Mumbai itself, are also increasing and shifting.

The consequence of such spatial processes of *othering* is that Muslims are no longer simply strangers in the city; rather the city too becomes ‘strange’ to them. Mustansir Dalvi suggests that in these circumstances, ‘the badland is no longer the ghetto but it becomes the spaces outside of the ghetto.’⁶⁴⁷ He contends, ‘the flipside of this is that the badlands transform into a myth-world where the common-law discipline of the ghetto no longer exists, and one may freely roam its streets ignoring (or flouting) both the laws and the civilities of quotidian metropolitan life.’⁶⁴⁸ He cites the example of young Muslim men who are often seen travelling on the roofs of commuter trains or performing peer-encouraged stunts outside its doors, riding two-wheelers recklessly, breaking traffic laws, ruling the night, as it were, with drag-racing along the Marine Drive.⁶⁴⁹ He contends that this behaviour is indicative of a larger worldview, and as these youth grow into adults and take their place as productive

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁷ Dalvi, “Mumbai Two Decades After: Landscapes of Exclusion and Mindscapes of Denial.” 1011.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid.1012

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid.

members of society, the city that they inhabit becomes more and more peripheral to their existence.⁶⁵⁰

The body is also often the site where religious signs and markers of identity become visible. In the case of Mumbai, *topis* or skull caps, *pathani shalwar kameez*,⁶⁵¹ *burkhas*,⁶⁵² or other religious signs like bracelets or signs on personal automobiles including number plates with the number 786 (which is considered auspicious amongst Muslims in India), make religious identity and borders visible and identifiable. Interestingly, during his work on Beirut, Mohamed Hafeda interviewed a taxi driver who removed sectarian signs and music from his taxi's dashboard as 'a practice of retreat' during periods of intensified violence.⁶⁵³ Hafeda suggests that 'this internalisation of an external urban apparatus appears both physically through the materiality of his car and mentally in his notions of (self-) censorship.'⁶⁵⁴ Similarly, signs on vehicles, number plates, stickers or religious idols may lose or gain significance depending on the context. Conversely, if one takes the example of Muslims from Marathwada in Maharashtra, these signs and symbols become blurry. Muslims from Marathwada are often considered as 'Hinduised in their practices' whereby their assertion of being a Muslim is not as strong or using conventional tropes. This heterogeneity is reflected through everyday practices whereby Muslim women from Marathwada adopt the *saree*, wear *bindis*, and choose not to wear *burkhas*. Perspectives also shape self-identities wherein individuals reject everyday practices like, in Gupta's ethnographic research in Central Mumbai, she found that many young Muslim women

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid.1013

⁶⁵¹ Pathani Shalwar Kameez is a style worn by Muslim men. It is a long shirt-like top with loose trousers at the bottom.

⁶⁵² Burkha is a long full body black cloak worn by some Muslim women in India. Different sects adhere to different styles and details. For instance, within the Bohra Muslim community women wear a similar outer cloak in fabrics such as cotton known as Rida

⁶⁵³ Mohamed Hafeda, "This Is How Stories of Conflict Circulate and Resonate" (Beirut, 2011). 30

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid. 30

reject the *hijab*. In Gupta's findings, a gentleman lamented how his daughter refused to cover her head and accused him of being 'fundamentalist' when he tells her to.⁶⁵⁵

Focusing on the intersectionality of Muslim marginality and gender, while researching questions of women and public space, Sameera Khan discovered that Muslims are almost uniformly referred to as "threatening" just as their *mohallas* are tagged as "unsafe."⁶⁵⁶ As a result, many Muslim respondents in the city report feeling more threatened as a community even as they appear to others to be more of a threat.⁶⁵⁷ This inverse relationship of those who are viewed as a threat themselves feeling threatened is noteworthy. However, the fact that the entire community is looked upon with hostility and habitually fears violence makes Muslim women bear the brunt in the form of restricted movement, strict community boundaries, and policing. Khan's ethnographic research also revealed the finer nuances of how ghettoisation caused by increased communalism has affected the everyday lives and practices of Muslim women. She uses the example of Jogeshwari (East), an area that has witnessed five riots. With each wave of violence, the area has suffered, the borders for women have been redrawn to be more restrictive. She notes that 'with each episode of violence, Muslims in the area were systematically pushed into a smaller and smaller settlement area at the peak of a hill, surrounded by Hindu settlements all around and having almost no access routes out of their pockets except through these Hindu areas.'⁶⁵⁸ In Prem Nagar, women's access to areas outside the slum settlement was the first way in which the border was redrawn: '[t]he men decided that they did not want their women to go out because it meant crossing the other community's areas, so the world of the women just shrank,' said Noorjehan Safia Niaz.⁶⁵⁹

Although every slum is different and the extent of ghettoisation across Mumbai varies, in Behrampada, 'parents who do not want their daughters to cross neighbourhood lines to

⁶⁵⁵ Gupta, "There Must Be Some Way out of Here: Beyond a Spatial Conception of Muslim Ghettoization in Mumbai?" 360

⁶⁵⁶ Khan, "Negotiating the Mohalla: Exclusion, Identity and Muslim Women in Mumbai." 1527

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid.1528

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid.

access English-language schooling are choosing the new Islamic-English schools which offer mainstream English-language education along with religious instruction in the *mohalla*.’⁶⁶⁰ Shweta Tambe, a housing rights activist who runs Committee for Right to Housing, an NGO in Behrampada, states that ‘their families are not okay with the girls going out of the boundaries of the ghetto, even Dadar, (the next train stop) is too far away for some of them.’⁶⁶¹ In the case of some middle-class families, if girls were granted permission to go out and study, the subjects they studied were strictly controlled. For instance, ‘we cannot allow her to do something which is not appropriate from the point of view of our family and community’s *izzat* (honour),’ said one father of a young girl in Nagpada.⁶⁶² Here, “inappropriate” usually refers to jobs that demand long hours outside of the home and neighbourhood or prolonged contact with men.⁶⁶³ Interestingly, the work of the NGO in Behrampada navigates is a ‘tricky terrain’, because the NGO is perceived to be empowering women, improving the mobility of girls. However, Tambe is aware that these activities are permitted under certain circumstances. She notes, ‘so far we are lucky because we have had no incidents, but if a girl runs away with a boy from the Hindu community, that will be it, it will have major reverse repercussions on our work!’⁶⁶⁴ Thus, crossing lines of the ghetto runs the risk of criss-crossing communal lines. That said, the figure of the outsider/stranger is not straightforward; in addition to Hindu males, even the migrant population living in Behrampada are a ‘definite no-no as there is no mingling between migrant workers and residents.’⁶⁶⁵ Even though migrant men share the same religion, they are considered outsiders who pose a threat to the women of the community and need to be protected against.⁶⁶⁶ In these ways, it appears that while the Muslim stranger is easily identifiable through quotidian and visible practices, it is through these syncretic

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁶¹ Interview with author, September 5, 2015, Mumbai

⁶⁶² Ibid.

⁶⁶³ Ibid.1529.

⁶⁶⁴ Interview with author, September 5, 2015, Mumbai.

⁶⁶⁵ Interview with author, September 5, 2015, Mumbai.

⁶⁶⁶ Interview with author, September 5, 2015, Mumbai.

practices like adopting the *saree* that the stranger blends in. While women are doubly bordered, the figure of the stranger is both Hindu but also the Muslim migrant ‘outsider’.

Questioning “Mini-Pakistan”: Sensitive Space

I visited the Committee for Rights to Housing, an NGO that operates in Behrampada in September 2015. Behrampada is notoriously referred to as *chhota* Pakistan tucked away inside Bandra East. The NGO operates out of a tiny office in a redeveloped Slum Rehabilitated Act (SRA) building.⁶⁶⁷ Peeling and run-down, the inside of the building was all green, Urdu posters decorating the walls and even the names of all the occupants on the name board were recognisably Muslim. As I climbed up the stairs, I walked passed children wearing headscarves and *topis* playing in the corridors. Loud Hindi music was blaring out of some homes while the sound of TV soaps competed from other houses. As I reached the office on the second floor, the room was busy with community workers sitting on the floor and some children walking in and out of the room.

⁶⁶⁷ Typically, SRA means the slum was rebuilt vertically offering slum-dwellers a designated space with very few amenities in exchange of majority of the land on which their slums may have previously existed.



Fig. 4.3: Name board at entrance of the SRA building where Committee for Rights to Housing (NGO) is located, Behrampada Bandra East, Mumbai
Source: Author's own

Tambe, the founder, began to explain what it means to live in Behrampada today. She had been working on community building initiatives in Behrampada since the aftermath of the Bombay Riots. Owing to the riots, the local municipal corporation known as the BMC, had stopped servicing this community's civic needs.⁶⁶⁸ Tambe added, 'whatever that could be done from outside was okay, water services were okay, solid waste management was a huge problem because it entailed physically coming to the community and picking the garbage, people were not willing to do that.'⁶⁶⁹ 'Why not?' I asked. Tambe bluntly responded, 'Because they believe, *Pakistani rehte hain, maardalenge kaat daalenge*', (Pakistanis live here, they will cut you and kill you!). 'But how could they say that?' I

⁶⁶⁸ Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) is the city's council and administrative body responsible for civic services.

⁶⁶⁹ Interview with author, September 5, 2015, Mumbai.

pressed on. Tambe nonchalantly replied, ‘You can say anything.’ This nonchalance perhaps stemmed from the fact that this NGO fights for basic rights and services on an everyday basis and grapples with the more practical effects of these perceptions aside from just stigma and fear. Many of the residents suffered severe health conditions owing to the lack of solid waste management services and garbage collection by the local corporation. Civic bodies in the city themselves play an important role in reifying and upholding b/orders based on the sheer unwillingness to enter this mini-Pakistan.

Curious about Tambe’s positionality in relation to the community, I asked whether the community views her, a Hindu Maharashtrian, as an outsider occupying their space? ‘We are on rent, there was a time when they had pelted stones on me because I was an outsider. Yes, I belong to another community. They still look at us as outsiders but gradually we have built the rapport.’⁶⁷⁰ Just as she completed her sentence, as if on cue, a woman entered the office complaining about her domestic woes that Tambe began to address while I turned off my recorder. While it appeared that Tambe was crossing the lines of the ghetto by entering a “Muslim space”; it also brings to light the how the binaries of insider/outsider are manoeuvred. In this case, Tambe negotiates this position by prioritising the shared socio-economic divide rather than religious divisions, ‘If you see our profile most of our community workers are either from this community or neighbouring communities so what makes them more acceptable is the fact that they come from the same socio-economic background so there is this identification with them and the issues we deal with.’⁶⁷¹ Ultimately, she says, ‘affordable housing in Mumbai is deficient for a Hindu and for a Muslim, just harder for Muslims.’⁶⁷² In these ways, the line between Hindu/Muslim space may appear to follow border logics, but it does not restrict their transgression. If religious

⁶⁷⁰ Interview with author, September 5, 2015, Mumbai.

⁶⁷¹ Interview with author, September 5, 2015, Mumbai.

⁶⁷² Interview with author, September 5, 2015, Mumbai.

division acts as divergence, then the plight of affordable housing reflects a point of convergence.

Fear plays an instrumental role in these spaces. On one hand, it creates a sense of insecurity and otherness, while on the other hand, it makes documenting these spatial prejudices and practices of exclusion difficult, as people are extremely fearful of the consequences. The ghost of the Bombay Riots still haunts people and has left the Muslim community scared and vulnerable. Policies that target Muslims like meat bans worsen this fear and diminish their 'right to the city' in their own eyes.⁶⁷³ This fear marks Muslim slums- particularly to the police- as 'communally sensitive spaces.' During terror attacks, bomb blasts, or crimes, these notions immediately place Muslims in the areas labelled as 'mini-Pakistan' or 'communally sensitive slums' under suspicion. However, the most unexpected effect of this fear is that Tambe suggests when a Muslim goes and gets registered in a right-wing political party, it is out of fear. She says, 'many young boys from this community (Behrampada) are part of the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) and Shiv Sena as it screens them for being viewed as threats', and emphasises '*many*.'⁶⁷⁴ At the same time, former Member of Parliament Priya Dutt of the Bandra constituency claims that 'It is a scary time for Muslims, they always feel a certain sense of fear, anything can happen.'⁶⁷⁵ She gives the example of the ten-day meat ban in 2015 that was passed by the Shiv Sena government in Mumbai during a Jain festival.⁶⁷⁶ She says 'Why are Mira road and Bhayender targeted, just because they are Muslim dominated? How can you (the Shiv Sena)

⁶⁷³ Edward. Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010). 6

⁶⁷⁴ Interview with author, September 5, 2015, Mumbai.

In the recent civic body elections held in 2017, although the Shiv Sena result dominated, the number of Muslim candidates went up from 23 in 2012 to 32 in 2017.

Manoj Nair, "Does Ghettoisation Push-up Representation of Muslims in Mumbai Civic Body?," *Hindustan Times*, April 4, 2017. (Accessed May 15, 2017)

Anagha Sawant, "#BMCPolls2017 Shiv Sena Wins for the First Time in Bandra's Muslim Pockets," *Daily News and Analysis (DNA)*, 2017. (Accessed May 15, 2017)

⁶⁷⁵ Interview with author, September 9, 2015, Mumbai.

⁶⁷⁶ In the first week of September, the BJP-ruled Mira Bhayander Municipal Corporation (MBMC) decided to impose an eight-day ban on slaughter of animals and sale of meat. The Shiv Sena and MNS protested the decision. This decision led to a huge public and political debate for owing to the very polarising nature of this ban.

do this, you are only dividing us more.’⁶⁷⁷ While it may appear that meat-bans primarily target the Muslim community, there are also instances where non-Muslims like non-vegetarian Maharashtrians face prejudice and exclusion.⁶⁷⁸ These illustrations highlight the myriad and incongruent ways in which the binary of ‘us’ and ‘them’ is subverted by lines that are constantly being negotiated and manipulated.

Purity and Danger: Stereotypes, Stigma, and the Muslim Stranger

The decision to relocate the city’s *katalkhanas*, or abattoirs, from the city to its outskirts was viewed as politically driven, since most of Mumbai’s abattoirs are run by the Muslim community. Abattoirs were moved from the inner city to the periphery like the case of Shivaji Nagar, using occupation as a pretext for “cleaning” of the city.⁶⁷⁹ Interestingly, Mary Douglas’ seminal work, *Purity and Danger*, describes the relationship between margins, boundaries and social pollution that each society maintains.⁶⁸⁰ Douglas categorises four kinds of social pollution that seem worth distinguishing: ‘the first is danger pressing on external boundaries; the second, danger from transgressing the internal lines of the system; the third, danger in the margins of the lines. The fourth is danger from internal contradiction, when some of the basic postulates are denied by other basic postulates, so that at certain points the systems seems to be at war with itself.’⁶⁸¹ It is key to note how ideas of pollution are identified with external boundaries or margins, where pollution is something to be kept on the outside. This is manifest in processes that have broadened the boundaries of Mumbai itself through the expulsion of the strange/r. Ideas shape notions of the strange/r and perpetuate divides owing to this sheer incongruity between purity and danger. Purity derived from vegetarianism, cleanliness, wealth, and morality are key distinguishing factors in comparison to Muslims, who are repeatedly caricatured as dirty,

⁶⁷⁷ Interview with author, September 9, 2015, Mumbai.

⁶⁷⁸ V Narayan and Ambarish Mishra, “Marathi Family Attacked for Cooking Non-Veg, Society Refutes Charge,” *The Times of India*, July 18, 2015. (Accessed August 12, 2017)

⁶⁷⁹ Contractor, “‘Unwanted in My City’: The Making of a ‘Muslim Slum’ in Mumbai.”

⁶⁸⁰ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Routledge, 1966).121

⁶⁸¹ Ibid.

beef-eating, wife-beating in the case of men, unhygienic, criminal, *bhais* (local lingo for goons) and colloquially referred to as ‘danger type.’

These ideas of purity and danger are deeply ingrained and are visible through different, subtle, and internalised everyday practices. Crossing from Behrampada in Bandra East to the wealthier neighbourhood of Bandra West known for its supposedly cosmopolitan nature, I overheard a middle-aged woman tell an estate agent about bringing new tenants: ‘dare you bring any Muslims here, I don’t want these shady men to come and stand outside my shop, please bring some clean people.’⁶⁸² Incidentally, the space that she was referring to was in a Muslim-dominated building that had a mosque built on its premise too. Her own space was in a ‘Muslim’ space but she insisted on keeping other Muslims out. She added, ‘you know during Eid, these people slaughter goats and the gutters are filled with blood.’⁶⁸³ The issue of goat sacrifice adds to the notion of the Muslim community as ‘dirty’ and violent. These narratives and stereotypes also underpin the unofficial ‘housing apartheid’ against Muslims, which rests on the parameters of foul smells, animal sacrifice, blood, and disgust. Social stereotypes, as ‘images that are formed of and by human beings, cultural constructs, shared beliefs, communicative acts that imply social structure’, serve as very effective tools in bordering and othering.⁶⁸⁴

Reflecting on the goat sacrifice from a ‘tolerant’ perspective, Meera* an animal welfare worker and resident of Carter Road, recognises how Hindus and Muslims can both be ‘hardcore’ in their practices. She even began with the clarification, ‘I don’t want to get into what is happening with ISIS, but it is the day-to-day activities, the harmony you have in your neighbourhood that makes me think about *them*... like I still cannot go and complain to the municipal corporation that the bungalow next to me cuts five to ten goats and I have to deal with the blood and smell and be subjected to that kind of torture or even that kind of unhygienic environment... I can’t take help of the police or corporation, because their

⁶⁸² Fieldwork notes

⁶⁸³ Fieldwork notes

⁶⁸⁴ Joseph and Rothfuss, “Symbolic Bordering and the Securitization of Identity Markers in Nigeria’s Ethno-Religiously Segregated City of Jos.” 172

Bakri (goat) cutting ritual is overpowering the law. This is illegal...my question is, is there more tolerance on our end or on their end? I find a lot of intolerance being the key issue.’⁶⁸⁵ ‘Why can’t you complain?’ I asked. ‘I cannot complain to the municipal corporation because I have to do it through my building secretary. My building secretary is a Muslim and I don’t want him to think that I am completely intolerant to his religion or practices. How much can one fight that (religious practices)? The point is we are not trying to fight *your* religion, *we* are just telling you to live in an environment that is conducive to everyone’ [emphasis in original].⁶⁸⁶ While Meera is implicit in this ‘us’ and ‘them’ binary, in Meera’s formulation there are disparate scales and worlds stacked together. Not only are narratives of Islamophobia operating at scales of global/local/national, but what is also interesting is how this homogenises the Islam of India, South Asia, the West, and elsewhere. While Meera seems careful about appearing ‘tolerant’ of these practices, her views have an implicit power structure that suggests a form of disciplining the stranger.⁶⁸⁷ Meera’s example resonates with Shajahan and Jha’s argument that the case of Muslims in general and those in urban spaces vividly presents a spectrum of processes aimed at control and domination through varied disciplinary apparatuses.⁶⁸⁸

These notions of bordering in the cosmopolitan neighbourhood of Bandra appear subtle but seem to pervade both commercial space and residential space. For instance, Zoheb Vakil*, a Muslim property developer from Bandra, states: ‘we recently did a redevelopment project in a building that had Christians living there previously and we added new flats. We noticed that if a Hindu comes to see a house and realises that there are many Muslims in the building...they think Muslims cut goats in the house, I mean we cut goats but not in the house, I don’t know why they think we cut it in the house, or in the building or they are

⁶⁸⁵ Interview with author, September 21, 2015, Mumbai

⁶⁸⁶ Interview with author, September 21, 2015, Mumbai

⁶⁸⁷ Interestingly, the use of the word tolerant is deliberate and not entirely out of context. This interview was also conducted at the time when debates over tolerance and intolerance were taking place within the Indian media as reflecting on the then new government.

“Here’s What the Tolerance/intolerance Debate in India in 2015 Was All about,” *First Post*, December 28, 2015. (Accessed August 5, 2017)

⁶⁸⁸ Jha, Shajahan, and Vyas, “Biopolitics and Urban Governmentality.” 52.

going to pray loudly and do *namaaz* in the building or do some *jihad* in the middle of the night or some nonsense like that... so then they don't buy the flats. So, we also ended up selling it to Muslims, coincidentally, actually not coincidentally but it is because Hindus don't want to stay in a predominantly Muslim area.'⁶⁸⁹ Inverting this perspective, it would appear that the Hindu practices of segregation are more ghettoising than mixed Muslim/Christian apartments. It is also elucidating that the premise for bordering is not just about smells and sights but also about sonic experience of 'praying loudly' or calls to prayer.

While the most common reasons given for reluctance to cohabit are quotidian practices and eating habits, these are relatively recent developments. In a news article, food historian and head of the history department at Ramnarain Ruia College, Muhsina Mukadam suggests that 'it is only over the past decade that food has emerged as a polarising factor in certain parts of Mumbai...when the city's chawls — where people shared walls, and food, with neighbours — made way at some places for high-rises, something snapped.'⁶⁹⁰ She adds, 'In the chawls, people would live right next to each other and never have a problem with each other's eating habits. Even if they did, they didn't comment. But that's changed over the last 10 years and certain areas have become homogenous spaces. The population of Gujarati and Marwari Jains in areas that were earlier predominantly non-vegetarian has gone up. They have the numbers and money power and have become more vocal about their opposition. It becomes a bigger problem when they think they'll find political support.'⁶⁹¹ The common euphemism 'no non-vegetarians' stands for 'no Muslims' in many apartments, particularly in south Mumbai. Conversely, Pablo Howlitt, in his ethnography of redeveloped *chawls*, narrates how a Brahmin Maharashtrian family smuggled tandoori chicken into their apartment building that is dominated by the Jain community.⁶⁹² Despite the politicisation of food, the categories of vegetarian and non-

⁶⁸⁹ Interview with author, September 1, 2015, Mumbai.

⁶⁹⁰ Manasi Phadke, "Mumbai Meat Ban: The Politics behind the City's Veg vs Non-Veg Divide," *Indian Express*, September 20, 2015. (Accessed August 1, 2017)

⁶⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹² Pablo Howlitt, "Strange Food, Strange Smells: Vegetarianism and Sensorial Citizenship in Mumbai's Redeveloped Enclaves," *Contemporary South Asia*, 2017, 1–15. 10

vegetarian do not neatly classify nor explain the inconsistent meat eating habits across caste, class, and religious groups. That said, stereotypes about meat consumption also appear internalised whereby they are no-longer considered shocking.⁶⁹³ Rather than seeing the exclusion of non-vegetarians as aimed at a particular community, in an interview with a builder, Howlitt learns ‘that the exclusion of non-vegetarians was not aimed at excluding a particular group of people from a building, but only the smell of non-vegetarian food.’⁶⁹⁴

Ghassem-Fachandi believes that the ‘Muslim minority community as carrier of disgust for meat is not simply a stable traditional stereotype, part of a series of symbolic and metaphorical contents. Rather the identification of the Muslim meat-eater is a form of *practical expiation*, insofar as the figure of the Muslim comes to stand for all those vices that many are incapable of renouncing on the one hand, and that are associated with consumption on the other.’⁶⁹⁵ I would argue that these narratives and ideas surrounding meat is a form of fetishising the Muslim stranger. Meat is associated with a ‘moral economy of food substances’, wherein ‘disgust is a defence against the appeal of lurking transgressive possibilities that meat signifies, and the disgusted reaction is habitually portrayed as a form of religious authenticity and dietary innocuousness.’⁶⁹⁶ Moreover, the ideas surrounding the moral economy of vegetarianism do not consider the underpinning dynamics of caste.⁶⁹⁷ This fetishisation of Muslims and meat echo Zygmunt Bauman’s view that ‘all societies produce strangers; but each kind of society produces its own kind of strangers, and produces them in its own inimitable way.’⁶⁹⁸ In this sense, stereotypes

⁶⁹³ Arefa Tehsin, “No Muslims Please!,” *The Hindu*, July 2, 2012. (Accessed September 1, 2015)
 Aijaz Zaka Syed, “Muslims Face Housing Apartheid in Big Indian Cities,” *Arab News*, July 12, 2012.

(Accessed September 1, 2015)

⁶⁹⁴ Howlitt, “Strange Food, Strange Smells: Vegetarianism and Sensorial Citizenship in Mumbai’s Redeveloped Enclaves.” 6

⁶⁹⁵ Ghassem-Fachandi, *Pogrom in Gujarat: Hindu Nationalism and Anti-Muslim Violence in India*.19-20

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid.20

⁶⁹⁷ For an interesting piece on caste and non-vegetarian food see Hugo Gorringe and Karthikeyan Damodaran, “The Hidden Politics of Vegetarianism: Caste and the Hindu Canteen,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 26, no. 20 (2014): 20–22.

⁶⁹⁸ Étienne Balibar, “Strangers as Enemies. Further Reflections on the Aporias of Transnational Citizenship,” *MCRI Globalization and Autonomy* (Paris, 2006). 4

associated with disgust, meat, and the moral economy of vegetarianism are necessary to uphold and perpetuate ideas of borders and continually produce the Muslim strange/r.

Contradictions and Unfixity

Having said that, it is equally crucial to acknowledge that while there are cases that try to 'fix' these borders, there are counter-arguments that challenge these ideas of b/orders. When I asked Zoheb whether his own religious identity influences his choice of clients (ie. does he prefer to sell only to Muslims?), Zoheb explains, 'we sell to anyone, we sell to anyone who has the money.' That said, Zoheb too seems to uphold stereotypes associated with Muslims, as he says, 'see there are some Muslims who create problems in the building or you know sometimes they sound a bit gangster-ish but may not have killed a fly in their lives.'⁶⁹⁹ He goes on to say, 'there are lots of Muslims even I wouldn't sell to but then there are Hindus also that I won't sell to, it's not about religion though. Give me an educated Muslim and uneducated Hindu, I'll pick the educated Muslim.'⁷⁰⁰ Zoheb alludes to broader marginalisations associated with Indian Muslims, with education being a key factor. It is worth noting that the notion of 'the backward Muslim' is not random but located in colonial practices of education.⁷⁰¹

While Muslims are considered one homogenous 'other', the sects within Islam in India also need to be explored further. If Hindus employ certain boundaries, even among Indian Islam, with the split between Shi'as and Sunnis very pronounced. An academic who studies Muslim marginalisation in Mumbai stated, 'in some cases, Shi'as would rather have their children marry a Hindu than a Sunni, it is that bad.'⁷⁰² There is another example of a Shi'a man with a Brahmin Hindu neighbour, who recounted that his father never allowed beef into their home because they did not want to offend their Hindu neighbours. They

⁶⁹⁹ Interview with author, September 1, 2015, Mumbai

⁷⁰⁰ Interview with author, September 1, 2015, Mumbai

⁷⁰¹ Sanjay Seth, *Subject Lessons: The Western Education of Colonial India* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007). 116

⁷⁰² Interview with author, August 28, 2015, Mumbai

celebrated *Holi* while the neighbours offered *sabil* during *Muharram*.⁷⁰³ He says, ‘we live more in amity with the Hindus than with the Sunnat Jamaat, the Deobandis. Their foundation is terrorism.’⁷⁰⁴ My interview with Zoheb too indicated the strained relation between Muslims in Mumbai when he stated, ‘I am making two apartment buildings, there are more Shi’as less Sunnis, and the third one next to them is only Sunnis. They refused flatly; ‘*hum Shi’a ke saath kaise rahenge*’ (how can we live with Shi’as) so then their conditions were such that, you give us one floor Shi’a and one floor Sunni. But how can I do that, one floor Shi’a, one floor Sunni – it’s odd to even tell them no, you’re Shi’a you stay on this floor.’⁷⁰⁵ Such examples illustrate the stratification within groups that are homogenous. These divisions are largely invisible to the rest of the city, because as Radhika Gupta argues, the entire designation of a particular area as mini-Pakistan renders diversity invisible.⁷⁰⁶ Issues and even skirmishes between Shi’a and Sunni sects during *Muharram* often go unreported.⁷⁰⁷ In her study, Gupta argues that the Shi’a are caught in India’s political climate insofar as they must balance expressing their distinct identity and protecting the idea of Muslim unity.⁷⁰⁸

In a field of overlapping lines and boundaries, those who hold key positions are clearly local MPs and Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) as they negotiate and operate across many religious lines. Moreover, if the issue with the Indo-Bangladeshi border is that of infiltration to alter the demographics of India, then the ‘numbers game’ does not escape the micro-scale of a constituency either. It appears that at the heart of the problem is an accusation of both careful social engineering of the nation and altering local geography and municipal politics. Voters too need to be appeased, and since most slums are organised on

⁷⁰³ Gupta, “There Must Be Some Way out of Here: Beyond a Spatial Conception of Muslim Ghettoization in Mumbai?” 359

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid. 360

⁷⁰⁵ Interview with author, September 1, 2015, Mumbai.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid. 359

⁷⁰⁷ For an excellent discussion on the case of Muharram and differences between Shi’as and Sunnis in Old Delhi see Kalyani Devaki Menon, “Communities of Mourning: Negotiating Identity and Difference in Old Delhi,” *Contemporary South Asia* 25, no. 1 (2017): 23–37.

⁷⁰⁸ Gupta, “There Must Be Some Way out of Here: Beyond a Spatial Conception of Muslim Ghettoization in Mumbai?”

a religious basis, the numbers game becomes important, especially in electoral politics. For instance, rumours would suggest that the Nargis Dutt Nagar slum in Bandra has been allowed to proliferate because it forms the basis of Priya Dutt's "vote bank." Although Dutt herself says 'I don't know why people think that is *my* slum, just because it is named Nargis Dutt Nagar⁷⁰⁹, everybody thinks it is my slum and that I am supporting suspected "outsiders" ... the truth of the matter is that these are people that came from Bandra East to Bandra West, if you ask me where the border is, it is between Bandra East and Bandra West.'⁷¹⁰

While Dutt may suggest that 'vote bank politics is a thing of the past, nowadays even in slums there is so much awareness, people do not just blindly vote' on the ground, shifting political power between political parties makes different groups vulnerable at different times.⁷¹¹ For instance, an interviewee Nasreen* who lives in a Muslim-dominated slum in Bandra West, could not meet for the interview because her slum, and her home, was partly demolished as per the new MP's orders. Zoheb on the other hand explains that 'a Muslim MP or MLA will never break another Muslim's house because he knows that one Muslim will go and tell all the other Muslims not to vote for this guy'... he adds 'but at the same time, if breaking this one Muslim's house gets him say 2000 votes, he will do it.'⁷¹² This fluidity is also reflected visually through hoardings that local politicians put up. For instance, during Hindu festivals there are Muslim local leaders wishing people a 'Happy Ganesh Chaturthi' and there are Hindu politicians who put up hoardings during Eid. In many ways hoardings are not meaningless, they could also be interpreted as devices used for marking territory. Very often they depict pictures of local councillors or politicians wielding power as well as staking a claim.

⁷⁰⁹ Nargis Dutt, is an iconic Hindi movie actress married to actor Sunil Dutt. Priya Dutt is their daughter and politician. She also runs the Nargis Dutt Memorial Charitable Trust in Mumbai. Nargis Dutt Nagar however is a Muslim dominated slum that has grown in Bandra Reclamation area that is considered Priya Dutt's "vote bank".

⁷¹⁰ Interview with author, September 9, 2015, Mumbai

⁷¹¹ Interview with author, September 9, 2015, Mumbai

⁷¹² Interview with author, September 1, 2015, Mumbai



Fig. 4.4: Hoardings in Bandra west combining images Mother Mary and Ganesha festival not only marks out territory but also shows how the two festivals are synergised
Source: Author's own



Fig. 4.5: The presence of goats in certain areas of the city marks territory as what may appear as mini-Pakistan
Source: Author's own

Religious signs, names, festivals and practices are seen to be overlapping. Religious festivals in Mumbai tends to be spatially organised, celebrated, and practiced. For instance, in the year 2015, the Mount Mary Fair for Christians in Bandra overlapped with the ten day Ganpati Festival for the Hindus that also coincided with one day of Bakri Eid of the Muslims. In Mumbai, boundaries between Muslim and Hindu neighbourhoods are very pronounced and are adorned with symbols, flags, graffiti, statues and banners.⁷¹³ Where saffron flags can be seen hoisted on houses and slum tenements dominated by Hindus; Muslim neighbourhoods can be recognised by green flags with the star and crescent. Statues of Shivaji and life-size cut-outs of Shiv Sena and BJP leaders dominate roads and provocative regional and religious graffiti can be found in Hindu-dominated areas.⁷¹⁴ These symbols separate the neighbourhoods. They mark territory and create a sense of borders in the city and perpetuate a feeling of being out of place or ‘outside’. These are subtle but very visible practices of territorialising space in the city.

Religious identity can be viewed as a ticking time bomb for violent politics that is subdued in overlapping congested urban spaces by upholding certain spatial b/orders. It may be true that mosques and temples are located on the same street in Mumbai, but the way space is utilised or ‘ordered’ is crucial. For instance, even if the temple and mosque are located next to each other, those who visit either the mosque or the temple will rarely mingle or cross into the strange/r territory. Invisible lines are maintained. Even the word tolerance implies a certain degree of having to tolerate out of compulsion. What Jacques Derrida refers to as a form of illicit geographical proximity, a proximity that is almost too close for comfort but simply tolerated.⁷¹⁵ It is therefore imperative to recognise that the sharing of public space should not be misunderstood as coexistence. The slum Dharavi, home to nearly a million people, is an example of Hindu-Muslim cohabitation. Since these slums are not just spaces of habitation but also occupation, the occupational choices are also tied to religious and

⁷¹³ Shaban, “Ethnic Politics, Muslims and Space in Contemporary Mumbai.” 215

⁷¹⁴ Ibid.

⁷¹⁵ Jacques Derrida and Rachel Bowly, *Of Hospitality* (California: Stanford University Press, 2000). 34

lifestyle choices. For instance, tanning, leather-making, soap-making and cosmetic manufacture are mostly undertaken by the Muslims in their part of their slum, and other jobs like plastic recycling, food production, and pottery are undertaken by other communities like Tamil and Gujarati.⁷¹⁶

During a walking tour of Dharavi, a large slum nestled in the heart of Mumbai, the slum was described employing a spatial imagination that implicitly followed communal lines. For instance, the young guide explained, ‘now we will enter the Muslim area, then we will cross to the Gujarati area.’⁷¹⁷ Subtle signs and symbols marks like the use of green paint on the walls, children wearing *topis* or headscarves, the presence of goats, and bunting with the Islamic crescent used for decoration on walls and entrances played a role in marking out the Muslim area. This was also accompanied by the smell of meat and the tanning industry. Within a few steps the sounds, sights and smells of the Muslim area were replaced with that of incense, *aartis* or devotional songs, and flowers associated with religious practices of Hindus. Interestingly, the meat storage room of the tanning industry in the Muslim area shared its wall with a big temple of the slum’s Tamil community in the Hindu area. This wall acted like a form of boundary or border between the two communities. Noticeably, the Muslim area had much narrower passages; in some places one had to turn sideways to pass through. In general, the area appeared congested and enclosed with very little sunlight and thus visibly ‘dirtier’ in comparison to the Hindu areas that appeared more ventilated, larger, and cleaner. Spatially too, the Muslim areas were encircled by the Hindu area, it appeared like a tactical confinement. Despite the absence of any physical demarcation, a clear ‘sense of border’ between the communities, even in a ‘mixed slum’ appeared visible in the salient differences of circumstances.

⁷¹⁶ Fieldwork notes

⁷¹⁷ Fieldwork notes



Fig. 4.6: Dyeing industry in Dharavi, described as located in the Muslim area, painted typically in green and with the crescent and moon bunting
Source: Author's own

Continuing with the walking tour, I enquired with our guide, a young boy whether there were any tensions between the communities living in Dharavi. He said, 'we all live together, there is no problem between Hindus and Muslims here.'⁷¹⁸ 'But when are there ever any problems or fights?' I press on. 'If a Muslim girl falls in love with a Hindu boy, then there is trouble' (laughs), 'why, what happens?' I press on, 'it is a big problem no, they have to leave for sure.'⁷¹⁹ What is interesting to note here is that although Dharavi appears as a convivial mixed slum, where Hindus and Muslims cohabit, marriage practices play a key role in maintaining lines and drawing borders. Furthermore, what can be seen to disrupt or disturb the established lines is the threat of inter-faith marriages. That said, like all borders, even these borders of 'Love-Jihad' are transgressed. While Muslims and Hindus do occasionally cross religious lines and marry, like so many transgressions, these too can often be violent endeavours. Moreover, like a border that is negotiated daily,

⁷¹⁸ Fieldwork notes

⁷¹⁹ Fieldwork notes

this religious line of demarcation is negotiated to various degrees. While in some cases, religious lines are negotiated in the workspace, it is different when it comes to domestic space. Interestingly, a girl with a Muslim paternal-grandmother and Hindu mother, imagined space in her own home when her grandmother was alive in the following way, ‘my parent’s room is like Hindustan, my grandmother’s room was Pakistan and our living room was the border where we met.’⁷²⁰ Despite marriage, she encounters the border at the heart of her own domestic space.

Branded as Bangladeshi

The case of illegal/Muslim Bangladeshis is a national issue, particularly in the Northeast state of Assam and Indian cities like Delhi, Kolkata, and Mumbai. There have been attempts by the Indian government, such as ‘Operation Push Back’ in the 1990s, to bulldoze slums in Delhi, round up “Bangladeshis” and deport them back to the Bangladesh.⁷²¹ In January 2003, the former Deputy Indian Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani, whose political party – the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) - has consistently advocated an uncompromising approach towards undocumented Bangladeshis, issued a national directive to all provinces to take ‘immediate steps...to identify them, locate them, and throw them out.’⁷²² Similarly, the leader of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (a Hindu right wing organisation) stated in January 2016 that Bangladeshis captured by the police should be given the death sentence and paternity tests should be conducted to trace the nationality of those suspected to be Bangladeshi.⁷²³ Nationally, the figure of the illegal Bangladeshi migrant can be seen as corrosive.

In Mumbai, I would argue that the figure of the illegal Bangladeshis infiltrator or migrant appears as a contested paradox, allegedly omnipresent yet invisible and hard to find. The

⁷²⁰ Fieldwork notes

⁷²¹ Ramachandran, “Of Boundaries and Border Crossings Interventions: Undocumented Bangladeshi ‘Infiltrators’ and the Hegemony of Hindu Nationalism in India.”

⁷²² Sujata Ramachandran, ‘Indifference, Impotence, and Intolerance: Transnational Bangladeshis in India’, *Global Migration Perspectives*, No. 42, September (2005). 2

⁷²³ Speed News Desk, “Paternity Test and 4 Other Ways Praveen Togadia Wants Modi to Deal with ‘Bangladeshi Infiltrators,’” *Catch News*, January 28, 2016. (Accessed August 28, 2017)

figure of the Bangladeshi primarily poses an economic threat, and to a lesser extent their ‘infiltration’ and multiplication is seen to alter the demographics of the nation and fester in the form of vote bank politics. Scattered news reports based on suspicion and hearsay about the Bangladeshi influx and the fiery discourse of politicians who speak in apocalyptic terms of a Bangladeshi ‘takeover’ of Mumbai are common and have two outcomes.⁷²⁴ First, it makes the factuality of whether there are illegal Bangladeshis in Mumbai murky. Secondly, it makes migrants from West Bengal or Bengali Muslims living in the city vulnerable to being accused of being Bangladeshi. Jha and Shajahan cite the case of migrants who are often referred to as ‘infiltrators’ required to possess ‘permits’ and are also made responsible for ‘rising crime’ and particularly ‘for crime against women.’⁷²⁵ For instance, in March 2015, the rape of a 71-year-old nun in West Bengal was first blamed on two illegal Bangladeshis who were held in Mumbai.⁷²⁶ Similarly, a Muslim *basti* (slum neighbourhood) located in a predominantly Hindu settlement of Sarvodaya Nagar in Jogeshwari is reported to be a Bangladeshi *basti*.⁷²⁷ There are several such slums in the city of Mumbai, which are unofficially declared as Bangladeshi *bastis*, like the case mentioned earlier of Nargis Dutt Nagar. These slums are under close surveillance by the police whenever there are incidents of violence or crime in the city. Illegal detention of people from Muslim *bastis* and torture while suspects are held in custody are reported to be very common.⁷²⁸ Yet, statistical information and factual evidence remains elusive.

Given that the very logic and ‘legality’ of urban governance leaves the urban poor with no other choice but to rely on ‘illegal arrangements that the poor always have to make: illegal structure, illegal strategies, informal arrangements for basic civic services, they are permanently rendered vulnerable at the hands of the agent of the state as well as the

⁷²⁴ Vasundhara Sanger, “Bangladeshi’s Will Outnumber Marathis in Mumbai Warns BJP Leader Kirit Somaiya,” *The Times of India*, October 1, 2008. (Accessed 28, 2017)

⁷²⁵ Jha, Shajahan, and Vyas, “Biopolitics and Urban Governmentality.” 52

⁷²⁶ Subrata Nagchowdhury, “Two ‘Bangladeshi Nationals’ Held, One in Mumbai, for West Bengal Nun’s Rape,” *The Indian Express*, March 27, 2015. (Accessed August 18, 2017)

⁷²⁷ Jha, Shajahan, and Vyas, “Biopolitics and Urban Governmentality.” 55

⁷²⁸ *Ibid.*

slumlords.’⁷²⁹ As a result, Jha and Shajahan argue that they are forced to operate in peculiar forms of temporality, and people whose everyday life operates in a state of insecurity, urgency and emergency are often branded as unruly.⁷³⁰ Therefore, searching for the Bangladeshi il/legal migrant in Mumbai is like searching for the invisible of the invisible. To a large extent, they do not want to be seen or found. The marginalisation of Muslims in Mumbai makes the case of Bangladeshi or suspected Bangladeshi even more difficult. The problem lies in the blurring of lines between Muslims, Muslim Bengalis from West Bengal, and Bangladeshi. However, the linguistic category of Bengali becomes a strong identity marker, and migrants to Mumbai from West Bengal are often suspected to be from Bangladesh. For example, in July 2017, a squabble between Zohra Bibi, a domestic help in Noida and her employers, created a stir after a riot-like situation was caused by ‘Bangladeshis’ in a gated community.⁷³¹ The figure of the Bangladeshi domestic help or the Bengali migrant remained murky. Rupali Bibi, who has also been working in Noida as domestic help for over twelve years remarked, ‘never in my life have I come across any employer calling me a Bangladeshi even as a joke, I cannot imagine what have happened to them suddenly.’⁷³² These instances highlight that the borders are crossed not just by the alleged illegal Bangladeshi but also by those who ‘suddenly’ deem someone a Bangladeshi.

Shedding light on the mysterious figure of the Bangladeshi in Mumbai, Tambe states that ‘most of the Bangladeshi who came to Mumbai came after the 1971 India-Pakistan war...when they came here, many of them remained here and married Indians...their children adhered to their religious practice, way of life and but still very much looked like Bengali Muslim wearing a *lungi* and having a beard.’⁷³³ A person who wears a *lungi* and has a beard automatically becomes a Bangladeshi in the eyes of the others, so even though by default they are citizens of India, by practice they are not seen as Indian in the eyes of

⁷²⁹ Ibid.

⁷³⁰ Ibid.

⁷³¹ Angshukanta Chakraborty, “‘Ban the Bangladeshi Maid’: Why Noida Housing Society Violence Isn’t Just about Class,” *DailyO*, 2017. (Accessed July 27, 2017)

⁷³² Abhishek Dey, “Branded as Bangladeshis: In Noida, Anger Turns to Fear for Domestic Workers after Police Raid,” *Scroll.in*, July 14, 2017. (Accessed August 4, 2017)

⁷³³ Interview with author, September 5, 2015, Mumbai

the others... because their fathers are Bangladeshi, they too, carry this burden.’⁷³⁴ The distinction between citizenship and daily practices is precisely where the border seems to exist. Interestingly, when I did ask residents of Shastri Nagar, a predominantly Muslim slum in Bandra West, how they knew if someone was a Bangladeshi, they said ‘body language *se pata chalta hai*’, (we come to know with their body language).⁷³⁵ This also meant quotidian habits like keeping a beard, wearing a *lungi*, eating specific foods, and speaking in Bengali, separated the Mumbai Muslim from a Bengali Muslim/suspected Bangladeshi. Also, what is striking about this recurring theme of the *lungi* and beard is that even Border Security Force officers in the border villages discussed in the previous chapter, were confused about Indians and Bangladeshis because Indian Bengali Muslims and Bangladeshis both wear *lungis* and have beards. The *lungi* specifically is seen to be a hugely differentiating factor in the city and a source of confusion at the border.

Incidentally, the first time I met an il/legal Bangladeshi migrant in Mumbai was not arranged but was a serendipitous encounter. Nasreen, a domestic helper, narrated how she, her mother, and siblings crossed the border at night with the help of a ‘refugee’ whom they paid nearly Rs. 9000 each to help them safely cross the border.⁷³⁶ She described how she and her mother left Bangladesh in search of her father who came to Mumbai to pursue a better life in 1999. Interestingly though, the struggle of crossing the border did not end where and when it was crossed. In other words, the border followed them to the spaces that they inhabited. This meant that the family’s illegal status nagged their life in the city. Manipulated and intimidated by neighbours in slums, after the birth of Nasreen’s younger brother in India, and even after acquiring adequate legal documents to legally live in India as Indian citizens, Nasreen’s mother faced the charge of illegality. She fought a legal battle for nearly seven years. ‘We were so scared, neighbours would scare us and say the police was coming, I would hide by the seaside for hours...they would come and harass us for

⁷³⁴ Fieldwork notes

⁷³⁵ Fieldwork notes

⁷³⁶ Refugee seems to be the popular term that people use to refer to the illegal border crossers. The Spanish equivalent for this along the US-Mexico border are *coyotes* i.e. contractors who bring undocumented people over the border.

documents, for money...My mother feared I was not safe at home and she found me a job as a fulltime maid, so that I was safe under somebody else's roof" Nasreen added, 'nobody will come knocking at your house looking for Bangladeshis.'⁷³⁷

These allegations, made despite being able to legally prove that they were entitled to live in India, highlight the precarity of migrant lives even after they are legalised. The burden of the border does not end where the border does. Even though she is now married to an Indian and has acquired legal citizenship, she still carries the border with her and the story of how she crosses it even now to go "home." 'If given the opportunity, will you go back?' I asked her, 'most definitely, that is our home, we have fields there and a big house and all our extended family.'⁷³⁸ On another afternoon, Nasreen took me to meet her mother's lawyer, Akbar Syed, an octogenarian who fought her family's case. Although frail, Mr Syed instantly recognised Nasreen, and invited us in. Despite Mr Syed's poor health, he still goes to court occasionally. He became aware of this case, as Nasreen's mother used to work at his house as a domestic help. He offered help to the family and many other families that were in a similar predicament because he believed they were innocent and being harassed unnecessarily. Mr Syed explained, 'It is all a matter of rules, they keep changing them and when they said that these documents of Nasreen's mother could be forged, I argued that it was this government that was permitting forgery, that is not the fault of the person in question.'⁷³⁹

Delving into the question of Bangladeshis in Mumbai revealed that this case was not particularly isolated. In Shastri Nagar slums, in a small a community room being used to give polio-drops to new born babies in the community I met with a group of 'Bengali' men. I was unsure whether these men were Bengali or Bangladeshi. The interlocutor who had organised this meeting sat beside me in a proper officer chair while I chose to sit on a wooden stool. I deliberately avoided using a recorder here and promised anonymity to

⁷³⁷ Interview with author, September 1, 2015, Mumbai

⁷³⁸ Interview with author, September 1, 2015, Mumbai

⁷³⁹ Interview with author, September 1, 2015, Mumbai

everyone present. Although at first, the conversation was without flow, slowly a few men began to speak while a few other agreed. For the most part, most people preferred to remain silent. The gap between research, and research ethics of promise and anonymity still felt short. After a few cups of chai and some light-hearted conversations, the tension eased a little. Through the course of the conversation I learnt that many of these men who are still referred to as “Bangla” either came to Mumbai after the 1971 Liberation War, when the Indian state was welcoming refugees from the newly created Bangladesh, or were descendants of those who had. Some of these men shared stories of the challenges their families faced owing to their precarious status as ‘refugees.’ Many were faced with cases by the Crime Investigation Department (CID) because they were unable to provide documentation to prove the exact date of their arrival or citizenship status. The parents of a young man who works in a mobile repair shop came from Bangladesh to India after the war. Although he was born in India and possesses the necessary documentation and evidence, his father had to fight a fifteen-year legal battle. Eventually his father won, but the process as well as the duration took a toll. The migration to Mumbai has not severed familial relations across the border to Bangladesh. He still had extended family in Bangladesh whom they visited occasionally. ‘How did you go without a passport?’ I asked, ‘the refugee made us cross the border at night, you pay some money and they take you, usually between Rs. 4000-9000 per person.’⁷⁴⁰ Similarly, a young boy shared that even though he was from Siliguri, and had come to Mumbai to study, he was often termed as *Bangla*.⁷⁴¹ Not only is the city a location for the figure of the Bangladeshi but it is here where one finds stories of illegal border-crossings.

Sensitive to the status of these people, I asked the facilitator of this meeting how he managed to find forthcoming “Banglas” within the community since they prefer to remain invisible. I learnt that this meeting was set on the pretext that a popular Bollywood movie was being remade in Bengali and were looking for Bengali speakers in the slum. While I had no control over how Bengali speakers in the community were brought together, it

⁷⁴⁰ Interview with author, September 1, 2015, Mumbai

⁷⁴¹ Fieldwork notes

reiterated the sensitivity of even searching for “Bangladeshis” to speak to in the city. That said, it also made visible the “Bangladeshi” not just through ‘body language’ and wearing the *lungi*, but also through the common interest of Bollywood movies. These groups of people, whether Bangladeshi or otherwise, are nonetheless vulnerable even within their immediate community.⁷⁴² This is an important lesson to consider when trying to speak to people who may want to remain invisible but also vulnerable to convenient categorisation as strange or stranger.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter tried to fuse the spatial marginality of Muslims in Mumbai and the ambiguous figure of the illegal Bangladeshi in Mumbai to illustrate the ways in which the border and ideas of the border appear and operate in the city. Using dissimilar and contradictory examples, the chapter illustrated the ambivalent and contradictory nature of the bordering practices in urban space. While the violence associated with the Bombay Riots brought the notion of the border to the city, in contemporary Mumbai, the idea of borders works in more subtle, internalised, and nuanced ways. While notions of *chhota* or mini-Pakistan exist, they are neither singular nor as simplistic. ‘The border’ does not appear to be clear-cut or adhere to simplistic religious binaries. On the ground, notions of identity, belonging, and boundaries are more complex and intricate. For instance, the case of young Muslim boys in Behrampada joining parties associated like Shiv Sena shows how identities and affiliations are contextual, subversive and counter-intuitive. While it may seem that post-riot Mumbai has not fully healed from the effects of the riots in terms of its spatiality and notions of marginality, these ideas of borders remain malleable and fungible. The stereotypes associated with the Muslim community, who are deemed dirty and dangerous

⁷⁴² Regarding interviewing Bangladeshis in Delhi’s slums Sujata Ramachandran elucidates the key difficulties and methodological factors one ought to consider when researching clandestine migrants

See Sujata Ramachandran, “‘There Are Many Bangladeshis in New Delhi, but . . .’: Methodological Routines and Fieldwork Anxieties,” *Population, Space and Place* 10 (2004): 255–70.

are familiar but also constantly reproduce the figure of the stranger against which a sense of insecurity ought to be perpetuated and borders are to be maintained.

Like the border in the previous chapter, producing and maintaining borders necessitates its own sets of practices and processes that rely on stereotypes and fetishising the figure of the stranger whether through non-vegetarianism or the *lungi*. At the same time, the paradoxical unfixity regarding vegetarian and non-vegetarian food continually relies on a stereotype but it is also wilfully overcome and manipulated. This chapter argues that ideas of India's borders although distant, appear potent in urban space and imagination. In the case of the Muslims in Mumbai, the expulsion and voluntary migration of Muslims from the core of the city has also pushed the city's limits farther. With the movement of communities from the city, the borders of the city too have grown. Even today, as the city expands, its outskirts are increasingly being included in the map of Mumbai itself. In the absence of traditional borders like fences that the previous chapter discusses, the border in Mumbai appears more rigid in some instances. The imagined border does not need fences to mark territory like the physical border, but subtle signs like flags, bunting, or even names act as 'border signs' or territorial markers.

In the case of the Bangladeshi in Mumbai, the threat or ideas associated with it reflects the preoccupations of the border discussed in the previous chapter. Unlike the Indian Muslim, who is interchangeable with the Pakistani/enemy, the Bangladeshi's threat in the city is more manageable. The ambivalence associated with officially 'finding' a Bangladeshi and the ways slum-dwellers identify Bangladeshis based on their 'body language', speaking Bengali and wearing *lungis*, elucidates the paradox of how easy as well as difficult it is to be or be viewed as Bangladeshi in the city. The question of who is a Bangladeshi inevitably poses the question of where is the border associated with being Bangladeshi? In some ways, the idea of the border in urban space is summed up by what Thomas Blom Hansen has argued about identity, 'there are always multiple meanings, many narratives, and inherent

instabilities within such entities. One can say that the rigidity of the designator ultimately is impossible or that the name never can become completely “proper.”⁷⁴³

⁷⁴³ Hansen, *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Postcolonial Bombay*. 2-3

Chapter Five: Diaspora

Introduction

Running late for an interview one morning, I spontaneously decided to take an Uber instead of the number thirty-seven bus from Solihull into Birmingham. Relieved by its instant arrival, I leaped in and thanked the driver. Surpassing polite small-talk, our conversation switched to why I was in Birmingham. ‘What are you researching here then?’ asked the driver casually in his thick *Brummie* accent. ‘I am researching how different South Asian communities – Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis live together in Birmingham’ I said. ‘Hmm...’ came the response. After a brief pause, he said ‘I’ll talk to you yeah, if you don’t use my name. I have to live here you know.’ Surprised at this prospect, I replied ‘Sure!’ I learnt that he was a young second generation British Pakistani whose family had arrived in the 1970s to rebuild Britain’s post war economy. As we turned left on a roundabout, he pointed right and said, ‘look here, this is the border yeah, from here the Sparkbrook and Sparkhill area begins, this is where the Asian⁷⁴⁴ people, mostly Pakistanis live in Birmingham.’ I noticed that there was neither demarcation nor any signage, just rows of red brick terraced houses. ‘What about the Indians? Where do they live?’ I asked. ‘They mostly live in Handsworth and Soho road, that is sort of their area.’ ‘Oh okay... do the Asian communities live in peace or are there any tensions sometimes?’ I asked. ‘Round here in Birmingham it’s all the same. Nobody bothers you as long as you’re doing your own thing. You don’t mess up with somebody, nobody bothers. Like if you’re watching TV and the *azaan*⁷⁴⁵ comes on, like you got your Sikh friends they’ll just go quiet because they know it is respect, if anything of theirs comes on, we’ll go quiet.’ ‘But what about any occasions when lines get crossed?’ I pressed on. He responded with a smile in his voice, ‘ok, say if India and Pakistan are playing a cricket match yeah, if India wins, they’ll come to Stratford Road in their cars, beep their horns and drive around to celebrate India’s

⁷⁴⁴ Colloquially and in official terms South Asians in Britain are commonly referred to as Asians. The British Asian term is further hyphenated into British Asian – Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi. However, in this chapter, I will refer to Asians as South Asian diaspora.

⁷⁴⁵ Muslim call to prayer

victory. If Pakistan wins, then we go to Soho Road and do the same! It is just a little bit of fun, nothing serious.'

This brief and unexpected encounter with the taxi driver outlines how 'cricket connects South Asian diaspora to one another, creating an 'affective economy' of relatedness even through difference.'⁷⁴⁶ It marks an instance wherein national borders of India and Pakistan become pronounced between South Asian diaspora. So, it reveals the contours of the clear yet unseen border that is contextual, imagined, and practiced by South Asian diaspora in Birmingham. It underlines an implicit cognitive map where the distinction between the 'Asian' area from the rest of Birmingham is expressed in border terms. Moreover, this distinction is made in conjunction with the separation between 'Asian' Indian and Sikh, and Asian Pakistani neighbourhoods. The cricket celebration, although light-hearted, is meaningful because it exemplifies the subtle but significant distinction between an 'us and them' located within imagined territories or turfs of Birmingham's 'mini India' and 'little Pakistan.' To some extent, it also illustrates the durability of borders that are reproduced outside the nation in diasporic space. The cricket celebration and the 'local practice of cruising' is also symbolic of territorialising practices.⁷⁴⁷ Through recognition of and intentional transgression into territory of the stranger, it signifies the audacity of crossing an established line.

This encounter is a microcosm of the research presented in this chapter, pointing to the underlying relationship among borders, identity, and diaspora. Principally, the chapter examines the complex postcolonial borders of India with Pakistan and Bangladesh through forms of everyday bordering in order to explore borders in diasporic space. The objective of this chapter is to uncover the subtleties and complexities of everyday practices that

⁷⁴⁶ Parvathi Raman, "It's Because We're Indian, Innit?" Cricket and the South Asian Diaspora in Post-War Britain," *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 22, no. 1 (2015): 215–29. 217

⁷⁴⁷ See Laurent Gayer 'The Volatility of the 'Other': Identity Formation and Social Interaction in Diasporic Environments', *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*, Special Issue: Migration and Construction of the Other, Vol. 1, 2007. In this article, Gayer uses the example of cricket as an arena for contestation between Asian youth groups in Southall, London during the 1990s. Interestingly, this practice of 'cruising' and cricket celebrations is not limited to Birmingham.

establish but also challenge South Asia's borders, i.e. India's with Pakistan and Bangladesh. How are diasporic territories created and what are the borders of these territories? How and in what context do these borders emerge? How do everyday bordering practices of diaspora recreate or transgress borders of/at 'home'? Centrally, the chapter asks the following question: what happens to the borders of the nation in diasporic space? In some ways, the chapter also asks to what extent does the diasporic context allow for the idea of South Asia to breathe?

To address these questions, this chapter is divided into three sections: the first section will examine the relationship between borders and diaspora, outlining their significance the way that they frame this chapter. Then, it will provide an overview of South Asian migration under empire and in the era of the independent states of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The second section will discuss the place of South Asians in Britain, exploring their relationship with Britain and relations between South Asians in Britain. It will then focus on the case of Birmingham and London more specifically to understand diasporic spaces within Britain. What characteristics do Banglatown in East London or Little Pakistan in Birmingham share? What are the characteristics of postcolonial diasporic life in Britain? This section will draw on insights from field visits, as well as primary and secondary sources to interpret bordering practices among South Asian diaspora. Using the dialectic of fusion and fission, the third section will draw on narratives of diversity and communal tensions to analyse the border in diasporic space. Like the previous chapter *The City*, this chapter too searches for 'the border' in a context where there are no official borders. Hence the challenge of this chapter is to search for iterations, instances, and occasions of the subtle and internalised ideas and practices that are associated with the border. For this, the chapter examines the spatial imaginaries of 'Little Pakistan' in Birmingham and Banglatown in London. I draw from an assortment of primary and secondary sources, observations, interviews, walking tours, and news articles. I also use oral histories collected by Sampad Arts for the My Routes project that documents the rich history of migration and communities on Stratford Road, Birmingham.

In this chapter, I develop my argument in three stages. By drawing on the historical background of how diaspora arrived and settled in Britain I argue that the borders between

South Asian diasporic groups are influenced by pre-existing borders of racial politics in post/colonial Britain. Second I explore the position of British Asians, categorically and spatially to understand the location and boundaries of and between British Asians. The third section draws on practices and narratives that explore the tensions between nation, locality, religion, and region to argue that borders are situational but resilient in diaspora. Finally, the central argument of this chapter is that in diasporic space, the borders of South Asia are imbricated on the palimpsests of racial boundaries that are intertwined with ethnicity and religion. In diasporic space, borders appear contextual that become pronounced or gain primacy depending on markers of difference. Overall, this chapter finds that every South Asian diasporic community seems to have its own understandings and practices of borders. In that sense, the borders of South Asia do not disappear but transform and dissipate in diasporic context.

Bounded or unbounded: Between a diaspora and its borders

Before analysing the relationship between the border and diaspora as concepts, it is first necessary to define diaspora. Steven Vertovec proposes three ways of understanding diaspora. Namely, ‘diaspora’ as social form, ‘diaspora’ as type of consciousness, and ‘diaspora’ as mode of cultural production.⁷⁴⁸ Together, these definitions - social form, consciousness, and mode of cultural production - orient our understanding of diaspora in this chapter. Rogers Brubaker identifies three key characteristics of diaspora: dispersion, homeland orientation, and boundary maintenance.⁷⁴⁹ Brubaker explains boundary maintenance as the preservation of a distinctive identity in relation to the host society that

⁷⁴⁸ Steven Vertovec, “Three Meanings of ‘Diaspora,’ Exemplified among South Asian Religions,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 6, no. 3 (1999): 277–99. 279.

⁷⁴⁹ Rogers Brubaker, “The ‘Diaspora’ Diaspora,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no. 1 (2005): 1–19. 6

is held together by a unique, active solidarity, with dense social relationships that cuts across boundaries and connects members to form a ‘transnational community.’⁷⁵⁰

According to Brubaker, this boundary maintenance is manifest in ‘deliberate resistance to assimilation, self-enforced endogamy, self-segregation or social exclusion.’⁷⁵¹ Understood from this perspective, diaspora is bounded and ‘centred around the creation of boundaries of identity, community and nation-state.’⁷⁵² Diaspora as a bounded entity relies on a ‘fictive unity’, the essentialism of which is a political necessity for solidarity.⁷⁵³ Conversely, conceptualisations of diaspora as unbounded and based on ‘ideas of fluidity, movement, routes and the destabilisation of homogenising boundaries’ yield different conclusions.⁷⁵⁴ Stuart Hall defines the experience of diaspora ‘not by essence or purity but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*.’⁷⁵⁵

While these perspectives ‘imagine and construct space and place as porous, malleable and unfixed’, they do not consider the processes involved in the making of diaspora.⁷⁵⁶ Elizabeth Mavroudi emphasises that these perspectives do not acknowledge ‘the fixing, and unfixing of boundaries of identity, community, and the nation-state, and the ways in which people may be immobile, or caught within and between such borders.’⁷⁵⁷ From a geographical perspective, diaspora practices and identities should be understood within their location as geographical, historical, and material processes.⁷⁵⁸ Taking this into account facilitates an understanding of diaspora as the result of dynamic processes that are ‘always

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁵¹ Ibid.

⁷⁵² Elizabeth Mavroudi, “Diaspora as Process: (De)constructing Boundaries,” *Geography Compass* 1, no. 3 (2007): 467–79. 468

⁷⁵³ Ibid. 471

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid. 468

⁷⁵⁵ Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990). 235

⁷⁵⁶ Mavroudi, “Diaspora as Process: (De)constructing Boundaries.” 474

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid. 475

in the making.’⁷⁵⁹ More recently, however, Claire Alexander responds to Brubaker’s ‘diaspora’s diaspora’ intervention to develop the conceptual tool of diaspora. Alexander argues in favour of placing, or locating diaspora not just in terms of origins but more notably in terms of their destination and process of transformation that occurs here.⁷⁶⁰

The issue that arises, then, is between these formulations of diaspora that Brubaker calls the tensions between boundary-maintenance and boundary-erosion. Put differently, Pnina Werbner argues that ‘diasporas can be both ethnic-parochial *and* cosmopolitan.’⁷⁶¹ Instead of choosing between diaspora as bounded or unbounded, it is perhaps more productive to explore the tensions between the boundary-maintenance and erosion, as well as between essentialisms and hybridity. Endorsing these conceptualisations of diaspora allows for a certain level of openness that is necessary to test diaspora as a dynamic category. Unidimensional conceptualisations of diaspora understood either as ‘boundary-maintenance’ or ‘boundary-erosion’ fall into dichotomies that do not permit a nuanced perspective of the consistencies and inconsistencies of diaspora as a concept but also as a lived identity. Following Brubaker, I suggest that rather than thinking in terms of diaspora, it is more useful to think in terms of diasporic ‘stances, projects, claims, idioms, practices and so on.’⁷⁶² To reiterate, Werbner argues that ‘diasporas are full of division and dissent.’⁷⁶³ Nonetheless, by wrestling with these complexities and contradictions within the

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁰ Claire Alexander, “Beyond the ‘The “diaspora” Diaspora’: A Response to Rogers Brubaker,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40, no. 9 (2017): 1544–55. 1547

⁷⁶¹ Pnina Werbner, “The Place Which Is Diaspora: Citizenship, Religion and Gender in the Making of Chaordic Transnationalism,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 28, no. 1 (2002): 119–33. 120

⁷⁶² Rogers Brubaker, “The ‘diaspora’ Diaspora,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no. 1 (2005): 1–19. 13

⁷⁶³ Pnina Werbner, “Theorising Complex Diasporas: Purity and Hybridity in the South Asian Public Sphere in Britain,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 30, no. 5 (2004): 895–911. 896.

concept, and as an empirical reality, we can address questions of borders, boundaries, purity, and authenticity that the notion of diaspora proliferates and disrupts.

The tensions between the bounded and unbounded nature of diaspora open productive avenues to examine *how* diaspora as a category/concept is enlivened. Moreover, the underlining tension between the bounded and unbounded nature of diaspora indicates that the intimate relationship between the border and diaspora is inescapable. In *Cartographies of Diaspora*, Avtar Brah states that ‘inscribed within the idea of diaspora is the notion of ‘border’.’⁷⁶⁴ She adds that it is not possible to address the concept of diaspora without considering its relationship to the idea of borders.⁷⁶⁵ This is because diaspora insinuates the crossing of borders, and the deterritorialisation of identity, as well as the experience of dislocation and displacement are at the heart of diasporic experience. Didier Fassin suggests that ‘immigrants embody the articulation of borders and boundaries, they cross borders to settle in a new society and discover boundaries through the differential treatment to which they are submitted.’⁷⁶⁶ In that sense, it is important to make clear in crossing the territorial border one inevitably encounters symbolic and ideational boundaries, this chapter engages with the interplay of these borders and boundaries simultaneously.

Interestingly, Fassin uses the example of the way the ‘British ethnicise South Asians and racialise black English’, to draw out the interaction between external and internal frontiers.⁷⁶⁷ While Fassin identifies the territorial border through a horizontal distinction of inside/outside, Brah observes a hierarchical or vertical distinction that is based on ‘*configurations of power which differentiate diasporas internally as well as situate them in relation to one another.*’⁷⁶⁸ On combining both these formulations, i.e. the horizontal distinction of inside/outside as well as the vertical hierarchy of categories; we can obtain an understanding of borders and boundaries in terms of their width and depth. In other

⁷⁶⁴ Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 1996). 198

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁶ Didier Fassin, “Policing Borders, Producing Boundaries: The Governmentality of Immigration in Dark Times,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40 (2011): 213–26. 215

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁸ Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*. 183

words, we can also position the insider/outsider binary producing dynamic within a hierarchical relationality. This enables us to think of practices of inclusion and exclusion through structures of power/hierarchy i.e. through factors like race, class, gender, ethnicity, and religion.

Brah suggests that borders can be seen as ‘arbitrary dividing lines that are simultaneously social, cultural, psychic: territories to be patrolled against those whom they construct as outsiders, aliens, the Others; forms of demarcation where the very act of prohibition inscribes transgression; zones where fear of the Other is the fear of the self; places where claims to ownership - claims to ‘mine’, ‘yours’, and ‘theirs’ – are staked out, contested, defended, and fought over.’⁷⁶⁹ Furthermore, she marries her understanding of difference with Gloria Anzaldúa’s conceptualisation of border and borderlands ‘as a metaphor for psychological, sexual, spiritual, cultural, class and racialised boundaries.’⁷⁷⁰ Therefore, using her understanding of difference, Brah writes that ‘Anzaldúa speaks of borders simultaneously as social relation, the everyday lived experience, and subjectivity/identity. Borders are arbitrary constructions, in a sense, they are always metaphors.’⁷⁷¹

These metaphors are not merely ‘abstractions of a concrete reality’, however, but are part of the discursive materiality of power relations that can serve as powerful inscriptions of the effects of political borders.⁷⁷² In that sense, one could argue that ‘each border embodies a unique narrative, such metaphoric materiality of each border calls attention to its specific features: to the geographic and/or psychic territories demarcated; to the experiences of particular groups of people who are sundered apart or affected in other ways by the creation

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid.198

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁷¹ Ibid.

Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Book Company, 1987).

⁷⁷² Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*. 198

of a certain border zone.’⁷⁷³ The aim here is to gain insight into these competing narratives of exclusion, belonging, and difference within the British diasporic context.

Now that the conceptual scaffolding for this chapter has been established in terms of approaching the relationship between borders and diaspora. The conceptual scaffolding orients the identification and analysis of the empirical and contextual specificities of the British South Asian diasporic community. The next section undertakes a historical overview of South Asian migration to Britain.

Borders, Journeys, and Relocations

The history of South Asian migration to Britain encapsulates multiple and diverse journeys and destinations that originate from dissimilar circumstances and regions. Alexander argues that within diaspora studies ‘there has been an insufficient sociological attention to the historical and cultural specificities of diaspora experiences, how these impact diaspora experiences.’⁷⁷⁴ To remedy this, it is critical to consider the role of history in shaping and making the South Asian diasporic context. In Britain, the South Asian diaspora constitute a diverse group: descendants of Indians from the pre-partitioned Indian subcontinent; first generation Pakistanis; subsequently Bangladeshis, Sikhs; and second generation, ‘twice migrants’ – Punjabis, Sikhs, and Gujaratis from East Africa. While this chapter refers to South Asian diaspora as a hypernym for Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi diasporas, officially they are categorised as British Asian – Indian, Pakistani, or Bangladeshi.

It needs emphasising that South Asia is not a homogenous term, nor is the South Asian experience of migration to Britain uniform. South Asia, as a term, is the result of a post-coloniality that is spatial, chronological, and conceptual. Recognising the internal fragmentations within this term is essential to understand the finer nuances of identity and difference at play. The South Asian diasporic identity can be divided in different ways:

⁷⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁴ Alexander, “Beyond the ‘The “diaspora” Diaspora’: A Response to Rogers Brubaker.” 1552

nations – India, Pakistan and Bangladesh; religions – Hindu, Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains; linguistic groups – Punjabi, Gujarati, Bengali; and even regions like Punjab, Gujarat, Bengal, Kashmir and East African Punjabis, Gujaratis and Jains. Divisions could also be made by caste or along sectarian lines. The recognition of these categories of differentiation defy notions of an illusory coherence: there is no ‘one experience, one identity’ that can be ascribed, as Hall notes.⁷⁷⁵ While these distinctions in describing the South Asian community could hold applicability even in the context of South Asia, what brings these forms of identification or categorisation together is the diasporic experience or change in location. In that sense, when South Asians move out of the subcontinent, the ways in which they are identified or choose to self-identify holds different meanings than in comparison to ‘back home.’ Furthermore, these fragmentations also reveal the multiple and overlapping borders between diasporic groups that are both overcome and reiterated in claiming diasporic space.

History tells us that the South Asian presence in Britain is not a recent phenomenon. Historian Rozina Visram has shown that there has been migration from the Indian subcontinent to the colonial metropole for 400 years, with the first recorded instance as early as 1616.⁷⁷⁶ From the seventeenth century, this migration was characterised by the travel of *ayahs* or nannies and servants who serviced returning British families and acted as remnants or status symbols of a life in the Indian empire. ‘From the 1850s onwards, Bengali *lascars* from Sylhet were crucial in the work force of the imperial merchant marine, and many manned the engine rooms of British merchant ships during the two world wars.’⁷⁷⁷ Servants and sailors were the earliest Indian working class settlers in Britain.⁷⁷⁸ Subsequently, the eighteenth century saw the arrival of Indian emissaries, as well as Indian wives and children joining European husbands.⁷⁷⁹ The largest number, over one million,

⁷⁷⁵ Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.” 225

⁷⁷⁶ Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* (London: Pluto Press, 2002). 2

⁷⁷⁷ Annu Alexander, Claire, Chatterji, Joya and Jalais, *The Bengal Diaspora: Rethinking Muslim Migration* (Oxon: Routledge, 2016). 7

⁷⁷⁸ Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History*.

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid.

travelled as soldiers of the Indian army during the First World War.⁷⁸⁰ Finally, by the mid-twentieth century, members of the Indian royal families arrived and a minority Indian elite came to Britain for education.⁷⁸¹ From the 1920s onwards, a few Bengali ex-*lascars* began to settle in East London, their numbers slowly rising until 1945.⁷⁸² Petty traders, merchants, industrial workers, professionals, artists, performers, students and activists from varied backgrounds and religions were present in Britain too.⁷⁸³ The nature of colonial migration to the imperial heartland was primarily to service the empire. Visram notes that the life of colonial subjects was marked with racial subordination, subservience, and in a few cases, also some success.⁷⁸⁴ The tension between the status of citizen and alien was underlined by the dispensability of colonial subjects and the looming possibility of expatriation back to India.⁷⁸⁵ Therefore, while the borders of empire were not entirely impermeable for colonial subjects, they were governed by colonial logics of hierarchy.

The history of South Asian migration to Britain cannot be explained by a clear-cut distinction between the borders of the empire and borders of post-imperial Britain. This is because ‘the logic of such movements, i.e. which groups migrate and where they migrate to are structured around the very specific relations of power, labour exploitation and obligation generated by imperialism.’⁷⁸⁶ That is, although those migrating to Britain in the post-war/post-independence era may have been seen as ‘outsiders’, Jane Jacobs argues they could also be seen as ‘moving within a system which already included them.’⁷⁸⁷ These resettlements transgressed the frontier between core and periphery and led to ‘immediate

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid. 169

⁷⁸¹ Ibid.

⁷⁸² Alexander, Claire, Chatterji, Joya and Jalais, *The Bengal Diaspora: Rethinking Muslim Migration*. 7

⁷⁸³ Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History*.

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁶ Jane Jacob, *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996). 71

⁷⁸⁷ Ibid.

and intense encounters' that 'activated an unstable renegotiation of imperialist arrangements of power, difference and distance.'⁷⁸⁸

The arrival of ex-colonial 'immigrants' from the 1960's onwards was 'pejoratively portrayed as bringing the Empire home.'⁷⁸⁹ In the words of Roger Ballard, it marked the process of 'reverse colonialism.'⁷⁹⁰ Kalra *et al* argue that 'the arrival of the ex-colonial ethnically marked 'immigrant' in the British metropole signalled how postcoloniality confused the spatial and racial distinction between centre and periphery, nation and empire, citizen and native.'⁷⁹¹ The acute labour shortages in Britain from the early 50s to the end of the 70s fuelled migration from the Indian subcontinent. These shortages 'opened up all sorts of opportunities which had previously been closed to people of colour.'⁷⁹² Brah claims that 'if the colonies had once been a source of cheap raw materials, now they became a source of cheap labour.'⁷⁹³ The jobs available were unskilled, low waged, with poor working conditions and those 'which no one else was prepared to do', resigning Asian workers to the lowest strata of British employment and society.⁷⁹⁴ More significantly, it underscored the implicit coloniality of migration, with the possibility of migration only grounded in the labour market, and even then only once all other possibilities were exhausted.

Kalra *et al* draw explicit attention to this historiography. They remind us that 'because the history of ex-colonial immigration to Britain is most often told in terms of the post-war labour shortage, which was to be filled by semi-skilled and unskilled labour from the Caribbean, South Asia and West Africa, we can easily lose sight of its deeply re-inscribed

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁹ Nasreen Ali, S Sayyid, and V.S Kalra, eds., *A Postcolonial People: South Asians in Britain* (London: Hurst and Company, 2006). 21

⁷⁹⁰ Bhiku Parekh, Gurharpal Singh, and Steven Vertovec, eds., *Culture and Economy in the Indian Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 2003). 198

⁷⁹¹ Ali, Sayyid, and Kalra, *A Postcolonial People: South Asians in Britain*.

⁷⁹² Parekh, Singh, and Vertovec, *Culture and Economy in the Indian Diaspora*.

⁷⁹³ Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*. 21

⁷⁹⁴ Parekh, Singh, and Vertovec, *Culture and Economy in the Indian Diaspora*.

colonial dynamics.’⁷⁹⁵ In this way, post-imperial migration to Britain was unable to escape the colonial frame, and as a consequence, it re-inscribed dynamics of economic and racial subordination.

Indian and Pakistani men arrived in the 60s, 70s and 80s from the rural regions of Punjab and Gujarat, while Sylheti Bangladeshis were the last to arrive in the 1980s, after the Liberation War in 1971.⁷⁹⁶ Punjabi Muslims arrived from rural Pakistan like Mirpur, Jhelum, Rawalpindi, and Gujarat districts. ‘Twice migrants’ or Asian migrants from East Africa also arrived with British passports in the 70s and 80s.⁷⁹⁷ Most jobs brought workers to the Midlands manufacturing industrial cities like Birmingham, to West Yorkshire steel in Bradford, and to textile factories in Manchester, and Greater London.⁷⁹⁸ By the early 1960s anti-immigration campaigns were rife as post-imperial Britain was coming to terms with its own post-coloniality.⁷⁹⁹ This directly influenced the British immigration policy as the Commonwealth Immigration Act became more restrictive. Citizens of Commonwealth

⁷⁹⁵ Ali, Sayyid, and Kalra, *A Postcolonial People: South Asians in Britain*. 21

⁷⁹⁶ Rogers Ballard, ed., *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1994). 19

⁷⁹⁷ For an excellent overview see Parminder Bhachu, *The Twice Migrants: East African Settlers in Britain* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1986).

Pnina Werbner, *The Migration Process: Capital, Gifts and Offerings among British Pakistanis* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1990).

⁷⁹⁸ Noha Nasser, “The Space of Displacement: Making Muslim South Asian Place in British Neighborhoods,” *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 15, no. 1 (2003): 7–21. 8

⁷⁹⁹ Conservative Member of Parliament, Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech in Birmingham on 20th April 1968, was considered as a watershed moment. In his speech, Powell compared Britain’s immigration policy to piling its own funeral pyre. This controversial speech marked the politicisation of race in British politics as well as verbalised the confrontation of Britain’s relationship with its imperial past and postcolonial present. The speech can be found here: “Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ Speech,” *The Telegraph*, November 6, 2007. (Accessed November 23, 2016)

countries could no longer enter, live and work in Britain, as the 1962 and 1971 acts further restricted immigration to family reunifications.⁸⁰⁰

In Britain, racialised practices like the ‘bussing’ of Asian children to schools outside the areas in which they lived, and discrimination in housing and employment were rampant.⁸⁰¹ Political discourse was used that targeted and antagonised immigrants. For example, in the 1964 general election, Peter Griffith, the Conservative MP for Smethwick, a racially diverse constituency near Birmingham, used the infamous slogan ‘If you want a n*gger as your neighbour Vote Labour.’⁸⁰² Hostility was growing and racial abuse like *Paki* bashing, a racial slur directed towards all South Asians, was a common everyday occurrence in the 1980s.⁸⁰³

Despite these racial tensions, the Asian population grew, as workers intending to leave stayed on. Through village, kinship or *biraderi* (clan) networks, migrants sponsored fellow villagers and lodged them, thereby forging a process of chain migration that continued to affect patterns of settlement within specific geographies in Britain industrial cities.⁸⁰⁴ These transnational networks also resulted in the geographical clustering of South Asian groups, like Mirpuris from Azad Kashmir who clustered in Birmingham. Equally, the fact that ninety-five percent of British Bangladeshis in Britain are Sylheti demonstrates the ways that these social networks shape immigration.⁸⁰⁵ According to Ballard, these communities,

⁸⁰⁰ Ben Zeitlyn, “The Making of a Moral British Bangladeshi,” *Journal of Moral Education* 2, no. 43 (2014): 198–212. 199

⁸⁰¹ Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*. 26

⁸⁰² Stuart Jeffries, “Britain’s Most Racist Election: The Story of Smethwick, 50 Years on,” *The Guardian*, October 15, 2014. (Accessed December 11, 2016)

⁸⁰³ For an excellent overview and in-depth study of Asian youth movements against racism in the 1980s and a discussion on ‘political blackness’, see Anandi Ramamurthy’s *Black Star: Britain’s Asian Youth Movements*, Pluto Press; London, 2013.

⁸⁰⁴ Nasser, “The Space of Displacement: Making Muslim South Asian Place in British Neighborhoods.” 11

⁸⁰⁵ Zeitlyn, “The Making of a Moral British Bangladeshi.” 199

i.e. Mirpuris, Sylhetis, Punjabis and Gujaratis, used well-established networks to procure a ‘near monopoly of migratory opportunities’ to enter the British labour market.⁸⁰⁶

The history of South Asian migration sowed the seeds for postcolonial migration and the diasporic presence in postcolonial Britain. Through history, we gain insight into the contemporary continuities and characteristics of how ‘Asians’ were physically and metaphorically positioned within pre-existing structures and spaces. We understand why certain South Asian groups clustered around specific areas or cities across Britain. The historical background allows us to draw direct linkages between migration under the empire and post-imperial migration. Take, for example, the case of *lascars* or seamen typically recruited from the Sylhet region in undivided Bengal, present day Bangladesh, who arrived at and settled in the docks of East London. These ports of entry, as spaces of arrival, came to act as borders of entry for future migrants to enter. It is not a coincidence that Banglatown, i.e. the largest population of British Bangladeshis, is in East London, near the docks. It could be argued that these ports of entry created South Asian border-zones within Britain. Accordingly, Stuart Hall notes, ‘histories have their real, material and symbolic effect.’⁸⁰⁷ These historical accounts are thriving even today, as they cement individual and collective narratives of identity and belonging for second and third generation South Asians in Britain, like the taxi driver mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.⁸⁰⁸ Likewise, the

⁸⁰⁶ Parekh, Singh, and Vertovec, *Culture and Economy in the Indian Diaspora*. 201

⁸⁰⁷ Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.” 226

⁸⁰⁸ ‘My Routes’ project by Sampad Arts (South Asian Arts) in Birmingham opened in 2014 as a major community heritage project by that explored the changing history of the people, culture and landscape around Birmingham’s Stratford Rd since the 1940s. The project was funded by Heritage Lottery Fund and collected oral histories from the neighbourhood, offered taxi tours and several other events to engage with Stratford Roads history. You can find the project here:

“About My Route,” *Sampad: South Asian Arts*, 2017, <http://myroute.org.uk/about-my-route/>. (Accessed November 23, 2016)

Similarly, in January 2017 the Nishkam Centre in Soho Road, Handsworth in Birmingham launched the ‘My Story – Our Journey’ project (also funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund) to map the historical narratives of Sikh migration to Birmingham and the Black Country. See:

Nishkam Media Centre, “Sikh Migration Project Launch: How Will You Tell Your Story?,” *Nishkam Centre*, 2017, <https://nishkammediacentre.com/2017/02/02/sikh-migration-project-launch-how-will-you-tell-your-story/>. (Accessed March 12, 2017)

surge in community-driven public oral history projects undertaken by local organisations across cities in the UK to collate and communicate the historical roots of British Asian diaspora is noteworthy in terms of recording this history and establishing diasporic community in Britain.⁸⁰⁹

Hyphenated Identities: Bordering through the census and categories

Through an exploration of the historical background, the circumstances of leaving, arriving, and settling, one gathers an insight into ‘how and in what ways...a group is inserted within the social relations of class, gender, racism, sexuality, or other axes of differentiation in the country to which it migrates.’⁸¹⁰ Put differently, how a group appears to be situated, or this ‘situatedness’, explicates how different groups come to be relationally positioned.⁸¹¹ According to Brah, ‘relational positioning enables us to begin to deconstruct the regimes of power which operate to differentiate one group from another; to represent them as similar or different; to include or exclude them from constructions of the ‘nation’ and the body politic; and which inscribe them as juridical, political, and psychic subjects.’⁸¹² Diaspora space, Brah explains, is the point at which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of ‘us’ and ‘them’, are contested.⁸¹³ As a conceptual category, diaspora space is inhabited by migrants and their descendants, but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous.⁸¹⁴ One can understand situatedness, as dynamic position rather than just a context. This situatedness could be interpreted in two ways: in relation to the local context of Britain; and to the different groups constitutive of South Asian diaspora. To that end, it is impossible to exclude the British context in which

⁸⁰⁹ The Swadhinata Trust in East London is a charity that runs several community initiatives in the Tower Hamlets. It describes its primary role in terms of recording and educating the youth about the Bangladeshi community’s heritage.

⁸¹⁰ Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*. 182

⁸¹¹ Ibid.

⁸¹² Ibid. 183

⁸¹³ Ibid. 209

⁸¹⁴ Ibid.

the South Asian diaspora is inevitably located. This intermingling of locations, situatedness influences notions of identity and belonging.

The politics of labels and categories for South Asians in Britain demonstrates this situatedness in an interesting way. The different categories illuminate the markers of difference that pronounce the boundaries between the self and the Other. These categories, whether race, ethnicity, nationality or religion, reflect evolving notions of difference in Britain. Different forms of identification, and identity formation operationalise Otherness accordingly. The British mainstream political discourse on racialised minorities has undergone transformation over time. Generally, one can identify the shift from colour in the 1950s and 1960s to race, which gained impetus in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. This was followed by ethnicity in the 1990s and since the turn of the twenty-first century, religion has been predominant.⁸¹⁵ Kalra *et al* argue that ‘the conflict between a disavowed coloniality and postcoloniality is most vividly demonstrated by the chequered trajectory of the various labels deployed to identify people from South Asia in the wake of the (formal) decolonisation of British India: Black, British Asian, Asian British etc.’⁸¹⁶ Susheila Nasta argues that while the category of South Asian was ‘often used in government censuses as a means of distinguishing Britain’s black and Asian populations’, it inevitably flattened a diverse range of backgrounds stemming from complex religious, linguistic, and regional histories.⁸¹⁷

Kalra *et al* see a deeper issue persisting, when they argue that ‘the representation of South Asians in Britain is reliant on the conceptual vocabulary that is borrowed from the legacy of Indology and the continuity of the colonial gaze in comprehending the ethnicised former colonial subjects.’⁸¹⁸ The arbitrary and continual use of national labels such as Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi to designate even those settlers who have British citizenship

⁸¹⁵ Tahir Abbas, “After 9/11: British South Asian Muslims, Islamophobia, Multiculturalism, and the State,” *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 21, no. 3 (2004): 26–37. 27.

⁸¹⁶ Ali, Sayyid, and Kalra, *A Postcolonial People: South Asians in Britain*. 5

⁸¹⁷ Susheila Nasta, *Home Truths: Fictions of the South Asian Diaspora in Britain* (London: Palgrave, 2002).

⁸¹⁸ Ali, Sayyid, and Kalra, *A Postcolonial People: South Asians in Britain*. 5

exposes the confusion between national and ethnic categories.⁸¹⁹ It underlines the border (territorial/national) implicit within the hyphenated identities. A border that is maintained between being British and Indian, Pakistani, or Bangladeshi. The confusion arises when the national category implies within it a religious and ethnic category. In other words, when British Pakistani equals Muslim and British Indian equals Hindu. Although trivial, in these ways, the essentialisms associated with the border of the subcontinent, that prioritises if not erases the multiple religious identity of India to just Hindu get modified in the diasporic context. One could also argue that the British identity is hyphenated whether it is British-English or British-Scottish, it depicts the internal divisions of Britain; the historical difference between those hyphens and the British and South Asia hyphenated identity could be interpreted as maintaining the distinction and distance between the West and non-West.⁸²⁰ Kalra *et al* challenge the superficiality of the British prefix or suffix and instead use 'BrAsian' in their work. Although this chapter does not adopt the BrAsian category, it is nonetheless worth analysing. For Kalra *et al*, BrAsian is neither a conflation nor fusion of the British and the Asian, but it is a confusion of the possibility of both terms.⁸²¹ For them, 'the physical location of BrAsian settlers is not sufficient to mark them out as being incontestably part of a Western trajectory, nor does their heritage determine their non-Western character, BrAsian signifies the impossibility of a hyphenated identity.'⁸²² This category has been adopted by some scholars and can be seen as an alternative way of expressing the British Asian positionality in postcolonial Britain.

In 2001, the government included religion in the national census to better comprehend the composition of multicultural Britain. This seemingly innocuous addition altered the way British society viewed itself and its Others. Arvind Pal Singh Mandair critiques the use of religious categories to identify non-European subjects, arguing that such signifiers reproduce and reinforce the colonial relationship of West/non-West, Self and Other,

⁸¹⁹ Ibid. 7

⁸²⁰ Ibid.

⁸²¹ Ibid.

⁸²² Ibid.

whereby BrAsians continue to be seen in religious terms.⁸²³ The challenges for Asians, primarily British Asian Muslims, was markedly exacerbated after 9/11 and 7/7 terrorist attacks in New York and London, with growing Islamophobia and the fear of ‘homegrown’ terrorists.⁸²⁴ Ideas about race, ethnicity, and religious identity became intertwined, constructing images of outsiders that disrupted and defied a national sense of belonging rooted in whiteness and Christianity.⁸²⁵ The replacement of racism with the predominance of Islamophobia distorted inter-racial relations and influenced intra-racial relations: it disturbed how Asians – Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis – related to one another. It arguably became important for British Indians to differentiate themselves religiously rather than be mistaken for Muslim. Misrecognition or being mistaken for being Muslim based assumptions of skin colour became an issue for Asians.⁸²⁶ In other words, religious difference rather than race became the parameter of self-identification and difference. Even the term ‘Asian’ became tenuous. Jonathan Freedland noted that ‘those who used to wear the Asian label are now ditching it... one participant preferred to announce herself as a Hindu. Why? Because if she was just an “Asian” she might be confused for a Muslim – and therefore regarded as a terrorist.’⁸²⁷

Hasmita Ramji argues that ‘post 11 September 2001 many non-Muslim South Asians are striving to create and highlight very different pasts for themselves to enjoy a space in which perhaps for however briefly they are not the ‘Other’.’⁸²⁸ Ramji draws on migratory history and narratives to exemplify journeys of difference, as her title suggests. She notes, ‘if

⁸²³ Arvind Mandair, “(IM)Possible Intersections,” in *A Postcolonial People: South Asians in Britain*, ed. N Ali, V Kalra, and S Sayyid (London: Hurst and Company, 2006). pp.

⁸²⁴ Abbas, “After 9/11: British South Asian Muslims, Islamophobia, Multiculturalism, and the State.”

⁸²⁵ Deborah Phillips, “Parallel Lives? Challenging Discourses of British Muslim Self-Segregation,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 24, no. 1 (2006): 25–40. 27

⁸²⁶ For an incisive study on the case of misrecognition in Scotland see Peter Hopkins et al., “Encountering Misrecognition: Being Mistaken for Being Muslim,” *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 107, no. 4 (2017): 934–48.

⁸²⁷ Jonathan Freedland, “In the Grip of Panic,” *The Guardian*, January 22, 2005. (Accessed November 23, 2016)

⁸²⁸ Hasmita Ramji, “Journeys of Difference: The Use of Migratory Narratives among British Hindu Gujaratis,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 29, no. 4 (2006): 702–24. 710.

British Hindu Gujaratis are experiencing different trajectories the past may well be mobilized to explain these differences and distinguish their identity from other South Asian groups to gain a respite from some harsh prejudices in the current social climate.’⁸²⁹ Remarkably, Ramji is explicit about the purpose of her study and the use of historical evidence to justify and provide ‘respite’ for the Gujarati community, which is frequently subject to considerable prejudice by its association with British Asian Muslims. The British Gujarati community is not alone in seeking to distance itself from the British Asian Muslims. In the wake of the Rochdale grooming convictions,⁸³⁰ a news article by Hardeep Singh titled ‘It’s time to stop using the word Asian’ contends ‘it’s time to stop lumping Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus together as “Asians”.’⁸³¹ Further, Singh states ‘it is time for politicians and the press to bear in mind that in the context of these sex crimes, as with violent extremism, female genital mutilation, forced marriage and honour killings, the vague term “Asian” serves no purpose.’⁸³² Although Singh argues from a moral position, he outlines stereotypes commonly associated with the British Muslim community, a widely shared narrative about British Asian Muslims.⁸³³ Katy Sian coins this variant as ‘Sikh Islamophobia’ a fusion of historical antagonisms with contemporary realities.⁸³⁴

Conversely, a British Pakistani resident of Stratford Road in Birmingham stated:

‘Who are you Mr. Azim, I don’t say I am Muslim. But look, this name I can’t hide so people know that you are a Muslim. But I never want to because religion is not for communities why we are spreading it all over? We should not make

⁸²⁹ Ibid.

⁸³⁰ The Rochdale sexual grooming case was a very prominent despicable case that brought to light a huge sex ring involving underage girls and British Pakistani men. These men were charged for exploiting young girls in exchange for drugs, alcohol and money. The four main culprits will be deported back to Pakistan.

See Nazia Parveen, “Members of Rochdale Grooming Gang Face Deportation to Pakistan,” *The Guardian*, February 9, 2017. (Accessed March 15, 2017)

⁸³¹ Hardeep Singh, “It’s Time to Stop Using the Word ‘Asians,’” *The Telegraph*, June 8, 2012. (Accessed November 29, 2016)

⁸³² Ibid.

⁸³³ See Rajeev Syal, “Nigel Farage Tells Fox News There Are No-Go Zones for Non-Muslims in France,” *The Guardian*, January 13, 2015. (Accessed November 23, 2016)

⁸³⁴ Katy Sian, “‘Don’t Freak I’m a Sikh’,” in *Thinking through Islamophobia*, ed. S Sayyid and A Vakil (London: Hurst, 2010). 254

it a point for discrimination...in all forms here they say we are asking your religion and ethnic background because we want to see if we are giving these services to all the communities and religions, but there you divide us. Don't divide us... think of me as citizen of UK only as citizen of UK... don't go into details, I have black hair you have brown hair – this is where you are dividing...don't put these things in the forms.'⁸³⁵

This example exemplifies the underlying connection between everyday practices like form-filling and types of categorisation that reassert division and lead to the rejection of self-identification through religion. Mr Azim's example points to a graver issue. Historically, the census is a colonial practice, undertaken as an 'administrative necessity of knowing the 'natives', that objectifies, categorises, counts, and fixes notions of minority/majority identities.⁸³⁶ The division between an ethnically marked minority and ethnically unmarked majority perpetuates the idea of ethnic conflict that in the context of postcolonial Britain reaffirms the anthropological/colonial gaze in which BrAsians are caught.⁸³⁷ This becomes an effective othering device, an 'object to be used in the political, cultural and religious battles.'⁸³⁸ The categories it espouses are adopted by those it categorises to mediate their identities with others and, ultimately, to self-identify. As the examples above show, categories used in the official census trickle down to the everyday through mundane practices and become entrenched in the consciousness of those it categorises. Categories like ethnicity, race, and religion matter by way of refraction. In the case of Mr Azim, however, he defies and rejects this form of religious categorisation by distancing himself from his Muslim identity and choosing his British citizenship as his primary identity.

Drawing on these diverse perspectives, one could argue that the border with the South Asian diaspora emerges in the process of categorisation and identification, something which is attenuated when categories become loaded. On the pre-existing racial line drawn between British and Asian, the category of Asian fragments further according to religious

⁸³⁵ Interview by Saadia Khiani on September 12, 2014 for My Routes project, Sampad Archive, Birmingham. (Accessed November 17, 2016)

⁸³⁶ Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays*. 250

⁸³⁷ Katy Sian, "Understanding Inter-BrAsian Conflict: Sikhs and Muslims in the Diaspora," *Sikh Formations* 7, no. 2 (2011): 111–30. 113

⁸³⁸ Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays*. 250

parameters - Muslim, Hindu, or Sikh. Talking about colonial India, Cohn explains how objectification of the census became more significant to Indians in the process of classifying and making objective their own culture and society.⁸³⁹ This parallel could be drawn for British Asians like Hindus and Sikhs, for whom affirming their Britishness by adopting British Islamophobic narratives to distance themselves from the Other Asians and gain ‘respite’ from prejudice. In this context, the politicisation of religious identity gives the border primacy based on religious difference.⁸⁴⁰ Simultaneously, the colonial frame of postcolonial migration is indisputable. It perpetuates the ‘insidious bond between the empirical and imperial and indeed the constant return of the imperial as the empirical’, whereby the enunciation of British Asian identity is defined in religious traditions that Mandair argues ‘mimic a colonial gesture’ or adopt the neo-colonial politics of recognition.⁸⁴¹

Thinking of the expression of identity and borders spatially, let us turn our attention to the production and practices of ‘Asian’ neighbourhoods. This section explores the Bangladeshi community in Tower Hamlets in London and the Pakistani community in Sparkbrook, as well as the Sikh and Indian community in Handsworth, Birmingham.⁸⁴² The focus on the city is deliberate because it is ‘where legacies of imperialist ideologies and practices can still be seen through processes of segregation, re-territorialisation, marginalisation and displacement of migrant communities or as spaces of ‘managed “multicultural” cohabitation.’⁸⁴³ According to Noha Nasser, these sites of encounter and cohabitation are ‘borderlands’, denoting a condition between two extremes – a place of mutual

⁸³⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁰ For an in-depth discussion on the census and the adequacy of its categories and subcategories for Asians see: Peter Aspinall, ““Do the “Asian” Categories in the British Censuses Adequately Capture the Indian Sub-Continent Diaspora Population?” , Vol 5, No. 2, 2008, Pp. 179-195,” *South Asian Diaspora* 5, no. 2 (2008): 179–95.

⁸⁴¹ Mandair, “(IM)Possible Intersections.” 94.

⁸⁴² For an analysis of the northern cities of Bradford and Leeds see: Deborah Phillips, Cathy Davis, and Peter Ratcliffe, “British Asian Narratives of Urban Space,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 32, no. 2 (April 2007): 217–34.

⁸⁴³ Ali, Sayyid, and Kalra, *A Postcolonial People: South Asians in Britain*. 357

transformation and exchange between British cultural dominance and the South Asian paradigm.’⁸⁴⁴

London and Birmingham⁸⁴⁵ are not only historical spaces of arrival and settlement, but they are also emblematic of diversity and multiculturalism in postcolonial Britain. Partly owing to the location of jobs and cheaper housing, immigrants settled in rundown working class areas.⁸⁴⁶ For instance, in London the Indian and Pakistani settlement overlapped across three main areas—(a) the western and north-western belt running from Finchley round to Wembley and down to Hounslow, (b) the northeast between Newham and Waltham Forest, and (c) the southern concentration of Tooting.⁸⁴⁷ Bangladeshi settlement was more concentrated and detached from these Indian and Pakistani strongholds. Bangladeshis were largely confined to the boroughs of Tower Hamlets, Camden, Westminster, and Newham, with the highest concentration in Tower Hamlets.⁸⁴⁸ In Birmingham, the Pakistani population was dominant and concentrated in the Sparkbrook, Sparkhill, Alum Rock, Washwood Heath areas. The Bangladeshi community is settled in Lozells while Punjabi Sikhs and Indians lived in Handsworth, Soho Road, and Smethwick. In this sense, the

⁸⁴⁴ Ibid. 357

⁸⁴⁵ Birmingham is also an interesting case for its relationality with Britain itself. It is described as a ‘no-go city for non-Muslims.’

Syal, “Nigel Farage Tells Fox News There Are No-Go Zones for Non-Muslims in France.” (Accessed November 23, 2016)

Birmingham is also the city where former Prime Minister David Cameron gave his speech on extremism in 2014. Additionally, Operation Trojan Horse, a supposed plot to take over Birmingham’s school by Islamists and extremism is also based in Birmingham,

see

“Trojan Horse ‘Plot’ Schools Timeline,” *BBC*, July 16, 2015.

(Accessed December 12, 2016)

⁸⁴⁶ Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*. 22

⁸⁴⁷ J. Bell, *Imagining London: Postcolonial Fiction and the Transnational Metropolis* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2006). 161

⁸⁴⁸ Ibid.

British Asian diaspora is geographically dispersed into specific neighbourhoods or pockets but appear bordered by the city itself.

In mainstream British discourse these ‘inner-city ethnic enclaves’ or ‘Asian’ spaces are alienated, racialised spaces that are considered ‘deprived’, ‘poor’, ‘dirty’ and ‘dangerous.’⁸⁴⁹ The issue of racialised segregation gained prominence after the violent inter-racial clashes in the summer of 2001 in the northern cities of Bradford, Burnley, and Oldham. This marked a turning point and sparked debates on the limits of multicultural Britain and foregrounded the issue of racialised segregation,⁸⁵⁰ and Ted Cantle coined the term “parallel lives” to describe this phenomenon in the riot-torn towns of northern England.⁸⁵¹ This report also catalysed perceptions of British Asians, especially Muslims as ‘self-segregating’ or ‘living in a parallel universe’, and unwilling to integrate spatially nor socially. Further, it stigmatised ‘Muslim spaces anchored around mosques, and ‘other’ Islamic institutions as symbols of insularity and possible sites of insurrection, prompting questions about minority ethnic citizenship, national identity and belonging.’⁸⁵² Chris Allen contends that it constructed Muslims and Islam as inherently and irrevocably not a part of ‘our way of life.’⁸⁵³ Often pathologising British Muslims families as ‘inward looking’,

⁸⁴⁹ Phillips, “Parallel Lives? Challenging Discourses of British Muslim Self-Segregation.” 28 See a study titled Alessio Cangiano, “Mapping of Race and Poverty in Birmingham” (Oxford, 2008).

⁸⁵⁰ See Tariq Modood, *Still Not Easy Being British: Struggles for a Multicultural Citizenship* (London: Trentham Books, 2010).

Tariq Modood, *Multiculturalism: A Civic Idea* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

Bhiku Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (London: Palgrave Press, 2005).

⁸⁵¹ Ted Cantle, “Muslim School Children Are Still Leading Parallel Lives to the Mainstream,” *The Telegraph*, June 11, 2014. (Accessed December 12, 2016)

The report noted: ‘The extent to which these physical divisions were compounded by so many other aspects of our daily lives, was very evident. Separate educational arrangements, community and voluntary bodies, employment, places of worship, language, social and cultural networks, means that many communities operate based on a series of parallel lives. These lives often do not seem to touch at any point, let alone overlap and promote any meaningful interchanges.’

⁸⁵² Phillips, “Parallel Lives? Challenging Discourses of British Muslim Self-Segregation.” 27

⁸⁵³ Chris Allen, “Britishness and Muslim-Ness: Differentiation, Demarcation and Discrimination in Political Discourse,” *Identity Papers: A Journal of British and Irish Studies* 1, no. 2 (2015): 1–12.

reluctant to learn English, and clinging to “unacceptable” traditions, such as forced marriage and the ritual slaughter of animals.⁸⁵⁴

Factors like the nature of postcolonial migration to Britain, socio-economic conditions, the correlation between migration and ‘ghettoisation’, and ‘white flight’ partly explain these spaces. More recently, in addition to race, religion too has been mapped onto ‘Asian’ spaces. For instance, the 2010 ‘spycams affair’ revealed that Project Champion, under the aegis of the British government’s Preventing Violent Extremism (PREVENT), saw the West Midlands police install over 200 covert and overt cameras in the Asian dominated Sparkbrook area in Birmingham.⁸⁵⁵ Questions from residents, 60 percent of whom are of Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage, revealed that Sparkbrook had been targeted because it was identified as a place of ‘Muslim community.’⁸⁵⁶ After opposition and tense local campaigns, the cameras were eventually removed, but the indelible lines marking out Birmingham’s Muslim area remained.

⁸⁵⁴ Phillips, “Parallel Lives? Challenging Discourses of British Muslim Self-Segregation.” 27

⁸⁵⁵ Ajmal Hussain, “Transgressing Community: The Case of Muslims in a Twenty-First-Century British City,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37, no. 4 (2013): 621–35.

⁸⁵⁶ Ibid.

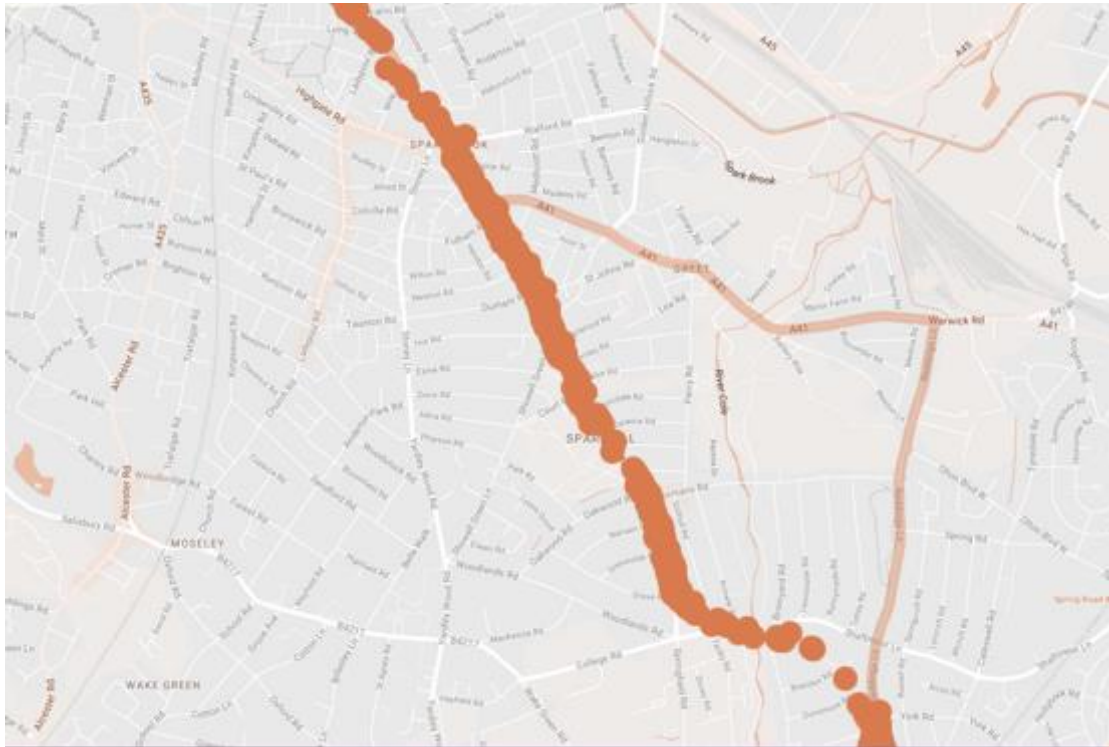


Fig. 5.1: Illustrative and interactive map of Stratford Road in Sparkbrook, Birmingham
Source: <http://myroute.org.uk/map/>

Ajmal Hussain argues that Project Champion operationalised a ‘discursive and representational regime wherein the spy cameras represented a dangerous incursion into the locality because of their power to interpolate local inhabitants within a framing of Muslim community that has become increasingly problematic on the national stage.’⁸⁵⁷ The targeting of areas inhabited by particular communities reinforces the idea of exteriority and otherness associated with Asian Muslims. Additionally, British Bangladeshi and Pakistani diaspora are socio-economically disadvantaged, resulting in their spatial clustering, in contrast to their more socially-mobile Indian and Sikh counterparts.⁸⁵⁸ The intersection of

⁸⁵⁷ Ibid. 622

⁸⁵⁸ In comparison to the rural origins of Punjabi Muslims and Sylhetis, Indian migrants were advantaged owing to their higher educational qualifications and backgrounds. Additionally, large number of Punjabi and Gujarati ‘twice migrants’ that arrived from East Africa belonged to the middle of the ‘colonial sandwich’ between Africans and British and were adaptive businessmen and traders with social capital. See Ramji, H, ‘Journeys of difference: The use of migratory narratives among British Hindu Gujaratis’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 29 No. 4, 2006, 710
Tariq Modood suggests the persistence of a virulently Islamophobic form of cultural racism that British Muslims face in comparison to their Hindu and Sikh counter parts. See: Modood, T.

race with religion and socio-economic class are important factors framing perceptions and realities of Asian localities in postcolonial Britain.⁸⁵⁹

Inner-city ethnic enclaves are also characterised as unsafe, crime-ridden, and in some instances, ‘no-go’ areas. For instance, a volunteer at the Nishkam Centre of the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha Gurdwara on Soho Road explained the location Gurdwara as at the ‘intersection of faiths’ i.e. adjacent to the Villa Road Methodist Church and opposite to the Handsworth St. Michael Church.⁸⁶⁰ Alongside, he described the rest of Soho road as dotted with crime, drug dealers and an unsafe place for me to be, especially after sunset.⁸⁶¹ On the one hand, these neighbourhoods reify alterity and marginality associated with borders, areas that are peripheral to or ‘outside’ the British core. On the other hand, the opposing narrative celebrates inner-city areas as vibrant, diverse, and multicultural, known for their culture and culinary diversity, such as Ladypool Road’s Balti Triangle in Birmingham or London’s Banglatown. This repackaging of difference marks, in Noha Nasser’s words, a “Disneyfied” South Asian identity, which creates ‘exoticised’ tourist enclaves.⁸⁶² Such articulations of British diversity function within the parameters of a recognisable, permissible, gentrified, and even consumable otherness.

The case of South Asian restaurants and ‘Indian curry’ illuminates what Elizabeth Buettner calls a ‘persistent yet evolving dialectic between the rejection, and embrace, of the “other”.’⁸⁶³ Within this lens, particularly with regards to British notions of ‘Indian’ curry, the borders between Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis merge into the colonial map of

Multicultural Politics: Racism, Ethnicity, and Muslims in Britain, USA: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.

⁸⁵⁹ See “Inequality, Housing and Employment Statistics,” *Institute of Race Relations*, 2011, <http://www.irr.org.uk/research/statistics/poverty/>.

⁸⁶⁰ Interview with author, November 14, 2016, Birmingham

⁸⁶¹ Interview with author, November 14, 2016, Birmingham

⁸⁶² Nasser, “The Space of Displacement: Making Muslim South Asian Place in British Neighborhoods.” 18

⁸⁶³ Elizabeth Buettner, “Going for an Indian: South Asian Restaurants and the Limits of Multicultural Britain,” *The Journal of Modern History, A Special Issue on Metropole and Colony* 80, no. 4 (2008): 865–901. 869

undivided India. Buettner highlights that not only are restaurants in Britain labelled as “Indian” but they are run and staffed by Bangladeshis and Pakistanis; their dishes normally differ markedly from what is consumed in the subcontinent and, for that matter, by most people of South Asian origin in Britain.⁸⁶⁴ This example not only exemplifies the post/coloniality that appropriates *and* defines, but also the depth of British multiculturalism. Additionally, these inner-city enclaves exemplify the paradox of South Asian diasporic belonging, as spaces of both inclusion and exclusion. They represent the celebration of ethnic diversity or ‘boutique multiculturalism’ and the rejection of ‘the problems of multicultural Britain’ owing to the supposed inability of immigrants to integrate.⁸⁶⁵ This tension between inclusion and exclusion reiterates the British Asian hyphenated identities or Buettner’s dialectic of rejection and embrace.

Such narratives of ethnically, racially, and religiously marked British Asian diasporic spaces also insinuate the tacit acceptance of the ethnically-bounded essentialised understanding of these spaces. This reductionist tendency enables and disables these diasporic spaces simultaneously. Further, it points to the fundamental issue of essentialism and hybridity, or notions of diaspora as bounded or unbounded that make these spaces identifiable but also belie and ‘reduce’ them. Therefore, the proposition here is to ascertain in what circumstances do contours of ethnically marked territories emerge as fluid or fixed? Claire Alexander encourages us to go beyond ‘the easy assumptions of ethnic communities and identity to reveal the more contested and porous boundaries of both material and imagined spaces and identify the role of agency and subjectivity of individuals and groups.’⁸⁶⁶ Therefore, an understanding of the overlapping layers of history, context,

⁸⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁵ Stanley Fish, “Boutique Multiculturalism or Why Liberals Are Incapable of Thinking about Hate Speech,” *Critical Inquiry* 23, no. 2 (1997): 378–95. 378–79

⁸⁶⁶ Claire Alexander, “Making Bengali Brick Lane: Claiming and Contesting Space in East London,” *British Journal of Sociology* 62, no. 2 (2011): 201–20.

situatedness and narratives of British Asians enable a better grasp of their dual relationship – both to Britain and their South Asian diasporic counterparts.

Producing the ‘Asian’ neighbourhood: Between borders of home and away

‘I tell you one thing, it is natural tendency of human beings that they fly with the same birds, you must never see a seagull flying with crows... because I used to come to Medina supermarket, it was a well populated area, with many Asians roaming about on the pavements either side and in the shops... so it was natural that I found a place where I thought I am not abroad.’⁸⁶⁷ (emphasis added)

Mr Azim, a British Pakistani resident of Stratford road, Birmingham

This naturalness and feeling of not being abroad are intrinsic to a process of making-home in Britain and underpin the making of the Asian neighbourhood. When Mr Azim explains why he chose Stratford road, he identifies the prerequisites of diasporic space: practical aspects like proximity to Asian shops. Ballard terms these localities a ‘local ethnic colony’ or ‘*Desh Pardesh*’ i.e. home and abroad, as ‘the embodiment of the self-created worlds of Britain’s South Asian settlers’, inscribed by an ethnic boundary.⁸⁶⁸ As the excerpt above notes, the visibility of other Asian bodies in public space fosters a sense of security and belonging. This embodied visibility and articulation of identity, coupled with access to material and mundane needs, cultivates a *feeling at home*.

This affective process by which a sense of belonging is manufactured, takes place through practices like establishing and naming shops, restaurants, and supermarkets. Names such as Attock Tours and Travels on Ladypool Road in Birmingham refers to the Attock region in Pakistan while Surma Travels in Brick Lane is named after the Bangladeshi river near Karimganj. These name boards written in English and Bengali or Urdu could be interpreted as a symbolic appellation of dislocation, origin and destination. Similarly, restaurant names

⁸⁶⁷ Interview by Saadia Khiani on 12th September 2014, for My Routes project, Sampad Archive, Birmingham. (Accessed 16th November 2016)

⁸⁶⁸ Ballard, *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain*. 21

like *Amargaon* meaning ‘our village’ in Bengali displaying the Bengali national flag serving Bengali food on Brick Lane in London is not only evocative of rural origins but also demonstrative of transnational locations and identities.



Fig 3.2: Bangladeshi life on Brick Lane (Halal shop, travel agent, Islamic shop)
Source: Author's own

Through the presence *here*, these names allude to a form of dislocation and absence from *there*. Such naming practices tie ‘here’ and ‘there’, ‘home’ and ‘away’, by using absence as a form of reaffirming presence. Interestingly, when Bangladeshi President Ziaur Rahman visited Spitalfields in 1980, he was given a copy of a street sign for Brick Lane. He promised that on his return home he would rename an important street in Dhaka ‘Brick Lane.’ Jane Jacobs argues that ‘this is not an imperial naming of colonial territories, but a more obscure postcolonial return wherein ‘Brick Lane’ is taken back to Dhaka not because it signifies the British imperial heart, but because it signifies a thriving Bengali diaspora in

that very heart.’⁸⁶⁹ Hence naming practices are symbolic, political and crucial at individual micro and macro levels of diasporic life.



Fig 3.3: Typical Asian jewellery store, Handsworth, Birmingham
Source: Author's own

The distance between home and away, the border between Britain and South Asia, is also renegotiated through the physical presence of Asian supermarkets on highstreets like Soho Road, Stratford Road in Birmingham or Wembley and Whitechapel in London. Acting like vital nodes they satiate quotidian needs of diaspora in the locality by supplying goods and objects from South Asia. The high-street is a busy thoroughfare that is visually and audibly distinctive from other non-Asian neighbourhoods and forms the basis of Asian social geography and cultural reproduction. Transport networks connect the British Asian diaspora to the city centre. Shops on the high-street abound with the smells and flavours of

⁸⁶⁹ Jacob, *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City*. 97

samosas, pickles, spices, fruits and vegetables spilling onto pedestrian space. Halal chip shops like Dixy Chicken and Bismillah bakery paste their halal certificates on their windows. Games from the subcontinent like carom boards and cricket bats are visible on shop windows. Soundscapes are imported as the beats and sounds of the latest Bollywood music ring out from the BBC Asian network or Sunrise Radio in shops and restaurants. Photos of Hindu deities, incense or Qur'anic prayers decorate shop interiors. Teenage boys and girls walk past me rapping lyrics in Punjabi on Soho Road. Posters about upcoming *ghazal* performances, 'The Super Muslim Comedy Tour', Bollywood movies, dance and *bhangra* nights, or celebrities from South Asia are haphazardly stuck inside shops, as well as on lamp posts and bus stops, and contribute to the material making of space. Beauty shops on Soho Road and Ladypool Road provide for Asian women with services like threading and waxing. Even products such as hair oils and skin lightening creams like 'Fair and Lovely' find their way onto the British Asian high street. Diamante encrusted traditional *sarees*, *salwar kameezes* and jewellery displayed in glass windows materially connect diaspora to the fashions of the subcontinent but more crucially, through their availability *here*, they allow for the traditional celebrations like weddings and festivals to be practiced and performed in diasporic space. These spaces service the Asian diaspora across Britain symbolising a bounded, hybridised sense of 'home' or nation. For instance, Amerah states, 'I think I know people now who are from like Ireland and Scotland that travel to Stratford road to get their Asian dresses for weddings'.⁸⁷⁰

The physical presence of banks like the Punjab National Bank, Bank of India, and Baroda Bank from regions like Punjab and Gujarat or Sonali Bank in Brick Lane also signify the presence of diasporic territories on the British Asian highstreet.⁸⁷¹ This circulation of people, goods, money, symbols, ideas, etc. across nation-state boundaries represents a

⁸⁷⁰ My Routes Project, Sampad Arts Project

⁸⁷¹ Katy Gardner studies the relationship between London, Bangladeshi migrants and the Sylhet region in detail and looks at the way in which remittances from Britain bring change the landscape of Sylhet with new homes. See: Gardner, K. *Global Migrants, Local Lives: Migration and Transformation in Rural Bangladesh*, Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1995. Gardner, K. 'Keeping Connected: security, place and social capital in a Londoni village in Sylhet', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (JRAI)*, N.S 14, 2008, 447-495.

specific field of practices and representations.⁸⁷² The geographical distance between Britain and South Asia is managed by the presence of several travel agents dotted along high-streets offering deals on tickets to the subcontinent enabling border-crossings. The offices of immigration lawyers are juxtaposed with shops advertising global money transfers, free remittances, cheap sim cards and calling cards are omnipresent on highstreets like Brick Lane, Soho Road and Ladypool Road. Not only are these services quintessential for maintaining links with the diasporic origins of immigrants, they enable diasporic life, and mediate the border between home and away. In this way, practices of procuring and consuming material, physical, audible, and experiential objects enable South Asian diaspora to recreate their imagined territories and territorialise diasporic space. Moreover, it also demonstrates how the reality of British Asian diaspora is both representational and material.⁸⁷³

Through everyday practices, processes and rituals, British Asian diasporic communities create their own localities or bounded territories. In the words of Arjun Appadurai ‘locality is ephemeral unless hard and regular work is undertaken to produce and maintain its materiality.’⁸⁷⁴ Over time, through physical and financial investments, as well as everyday practices, these spaces have also come to be viewed as national extensions of South Asia. For instance, an estate agent, and second generation Pakistani migrant, on Ladypool road in Birmingham claimed: ‘Mini Pakistan *has* to be... I must say, all over the world if we say Mini Pakistan it is only going to be Birmingham.’⁸⁷⁵ He added that even if affluence took British Pakistanis out of ‘Little Pakistan’ to better suburbs like Solihull, they remained tied to Stratford Road by their places of worship, businesses, and ownership of residential and commercial property.⁸⁷⁶ In other words, they seem to maintain ties with the location of

⁸⁷² John Eade and David Garbin, “Competing Visions of Identity and Space: British Bangladeshi Muslims,” *Contemporary South Asia* 15, no. 2 (2006): 181–93.

⁸⁷³ Werbner, “Theorising Complex Diasporas: Purity and Hybridity in the South Asian Public Sphere in Britain.” 898.

⁸⁷⁴ Arjun Appadurai, “The Production of Locality,” in *Counterwork*, ed. Richard Farnon (London: Routledge, 1995). 180-81.

⁸⁷⁵ Interview with author, Birmingham, November 15, 2016.

⁸⁷⁶ Interview with author, Birmingham, November 15, 2016.

diasporic ‘origins’ even if they move out. Similarly, Chatterji *et al* suggest that Tower Hamlets is ‘generally understood as the symbolic historical, social and cultural ‘heartland’ of the Bengali Muslim ‘community’ in Britain and indeed, is often regarded as metonymous with the ‘Bangladeshi community’ nationally.’⁸⁷⁷

In the case of Banglatown, the use of Bengali for street names visually and materially produces and marks a sense of Bengali space. This is supplemented by the construction of a large ornate metal gate at the entrance to Brick Lane, its red and green representing Bangladeshi national colours and can be interpreted as the border of Bengali Brick Lane. The establishment of these material objects and structures was debated when the community was establishing Banglatown i.e. reproducing diasporic space as national. On an unofficial walking tour of Brick Lane, responding to my observation that the lampposts were also painted in Bangladeshi national colours, my guide dismissively stated: ‘yes, but they got the shade of dark green wrong, this is the Pakistani green not the Bangladeshi green.’⁸⁷⁸ The key difference between the shades of green was symbolic of a national boundary, a transgression or misplacement of the Pakistani green on supposed Bangladeshi territory.

⁸⁷⁷ Alexander, Claire, Chatterji, Joya and Jalais, *The Bengal Diaspora: Rethinking Muslim Migration*. 106.

⁸⁷⁸ Field notes

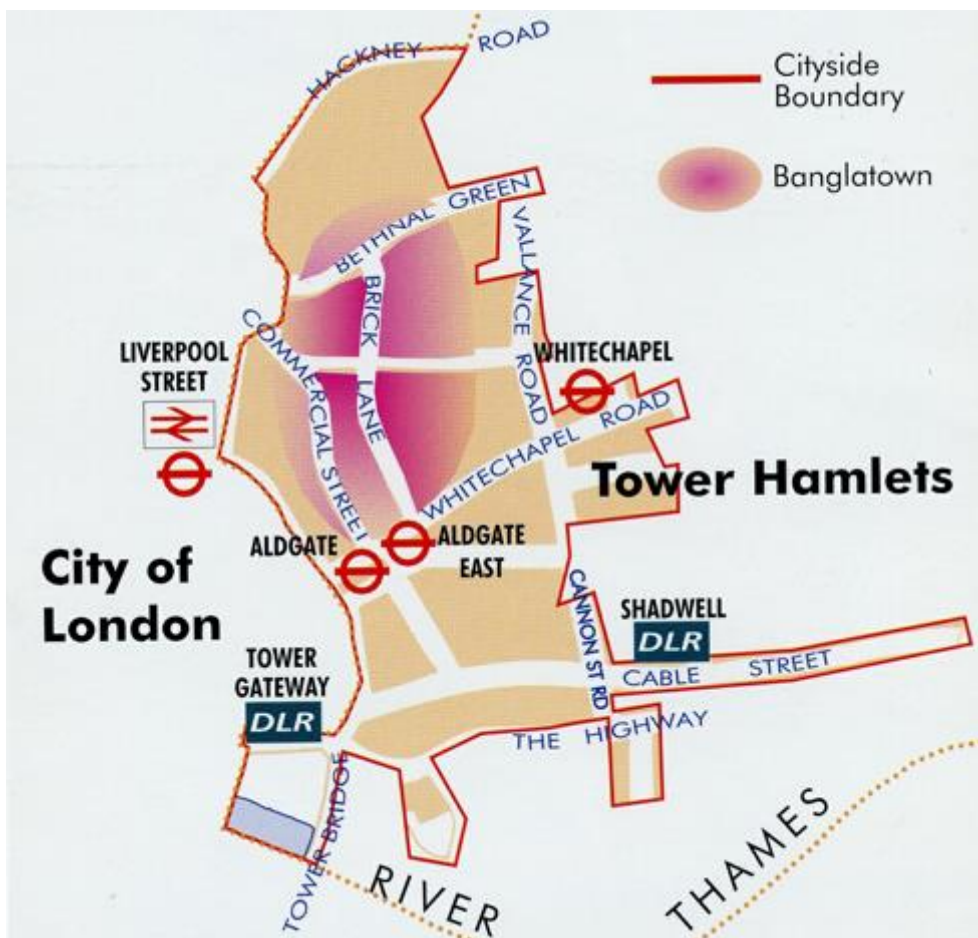


Fig 3.4: Map of Banglatown
Source: Swadhinata Trust

Critical of this nationalist territorialisation, Sayda, a resident of the area, believes that Banglatown could be intimidating for a lot of people.⁸⁷⁹ She notes, ‘if you study the roots of nationalism, it’s about setting out a territory and this is it, like cats do, human beings are similar; they tend to stick together... It’s different with Black people, when they came here they adopted the culture, took on English names, they went to the pubs... Here they didn’t, they retained that culture and they want to retain it, you know, by calling it ‘Banglatown’, or whatever, having their cultural meetings etc ... they tend to hold on to the culture a lot more ... I don’t see that as a good thing...’⁸⁸⁰ In Sayda’s view, Banglatown is a nationally

⁸⁷⁹ Halima Begum, “Geographies of Inclusion/Exclusion: British Muslim Women in the East End of London,” *Sociological Research Online* 13, no. 5 (2008).

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid.

territorialised representation of ‘sticking together’ which makes integration harder for Bangladeshis than it was for Black immigrants who mingled instead of drawing community fences. What is interesting to note from both these opposing examples is the tension between boundary erosion and boundary maintenance in diasporic practices and perspectives. For the guide, the reproduction of the nation was inadequate and incorrect, while for Sayda it was overdetermined and exclusionary. Even if these remain simply ‘Asian spaces’ to the host community, for South Asian diaspora, the demarcations of national spaces remain as clear as the subtle shades of green.

Places for religious worship are central to diasporic existence and the production of diasporic space. Mosques, temples, and Gurdwaras enable social organisation and form the institutional and physical structures for community life, religious rituals, and practice. According to John Zavos and Sarah McLoughlin ‘the increasingly elaborate domes and minarets of mosques, *Mandirs* and Gurdwaras remain amongst the most tangible symbols of the physical presence of South Asians in Britain.’⁸⁸¹ Several mosques on Stratford road and Brick Lane were converted from churches, public library or synagogues, signifying the changing needs of immigrants as well as the transformation of Britain’s postcolonial urban landscape. The physical transformation of the British cultural landscape through converting existing buildings into religious spaces for Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus frames the narrative of struggle and making home in Britain. For Sikhs, although Gurdwaras are places of worship and religious institutions, they are also the foundations of community-building, guardians of its core values and provide a space for collective worship.⁸⁸²

Similarly, Werbner argues that for Muslims, the mosque was the ‘central locus of cultural value, the focus of communal factional politics, a point of mobilisation, a haven for incoming migrants, and a basis for solidarity in times of crisis. It provided a platform for

⁸⁸¹ John Zavos and Sarah McLoughlin, “Writing Religion in British Asian Diasporas,” in *Writing the City in British Asian Diasporas*, ed. A. Jahanara Kabir, E. Tomalin, and W. Gould (London: Routledge, 2014), 158–78.

⁸⁸² Gurharpal Singh, “Gurdwara and Community-Building among British Sikhs,” *Contemporary South Asia* 15, no. 2 (2006): 147–64.

subaltern orators and lay preachers, excluded from British formal political arenas.’⁸⁸³ The proliferation of religious spaces has been central to place-making and border-drawing by the diaspora. In the remaking of sacred space, diaspora conspicuously re-map landscapes and even soundscapes to feel at home abroad.⁸⁸⁴ For South Asian diasporic communities, places of worship are the core around which community life develops, as worship becomes symbolic not only of religion, but also of culture, heritage and even nations, tying diaspora to practices of ‘home’. At the same time, the respective works of Nesbitt, Singh, and Nasser have highlighted that places of worship like mosques, Gurdwaras and temples are not immune from the internal divisions of the heterogeneous South Asian diaspora – as ethnic, national, sectarian and caste lines determine the establishment and use of religious spaces.⁸⁸⁵

British Asian cities are key nodes in the construction of a wide range of networks and religioscapes which sometimes extend beyond the local, encompassing the national and the transnational.⁸⁸⁶ That these places of worship are transnational spaces is evidenced by the voluntary activities undertaken by mosques, Gurdwaras and temples. For example, the Nishkam Centre on Soho Road shares a compound and wall with the Gurdwara but is a civic community centre for the Sikhs in Birmingham undertaking voluntary work in Punjab and Kericho in Kenya, elucidating the connective thread between diasporic identity, multiple locations of home, and the journeys of Sikh ‘twice migrants’.

⁸⁸³ Werbner, “Theorising Complex Diasporas: Purity and Hybridity in the South Asian Public Sphere in Britain.” 905

⁸⁸⁴ Zavos and McLoughlin, “Writing Religion in British Asian Diasporas.”

⁸⁸⁵ Singh, “Gurdwara and Community-Building among British Sikhs.”

Eleanor Nesbitt, “Locating British Hindus’ Sacred Space,” *Contemporary South Asia* 15, no. 2 (2006): 195–208.

Nasser, “The Space of Displacement: Making Muslim South Asian Place in British Neighborhoods.”

⁸⁸⁶ Zavos and McLoughlin, “Writing Religion in British Asian Diasporas.”



Fig 3.5: National and international locations of Nishkam Faith Community
Source: Author's own

Eleanor Nesbitt notes that UK temples are not community centres in name only, many provide for the elderly, and run language classes in Hindi, Gujarati or other community languages, as well as cooperating with outside agencies in matters of health, addressing common Asian diseases like diabetes and heart disease.⁸⁸⁷ Similarly, mosques also perform community and educational duties. They offer English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, Arabic and Qur'an classes. The Nishkam Centre, adjacent to the Gurdwara also runs nursery and schools on Sikh principles, as well as separate gyms for male and female usage, Punjabi language courses and a free community advice centre for issues like housing, banking, and immigration. Gurdwaras, Gurharpal Singh notes, act as religious,

⁸⁸⁷ Nesbitt, "Locating British Hindus' Sacred Space." 201

social and political hubs in Sikh enclaves, and assume an adjunct role to the state welfare system.⁸⁸⁸

At a governmental level too, these diasporic communities gain political voice and have achieved representation in British politics as faith based community organisations. In a way, South Asia's national boundaries have been transformed into boundaries of faith within diasporic space. In Birmingham, the inter-faith dialogue between faith community organisations is active and appears to be cohesive. For instance, a volunteer at the Nishkam Centre stressed that the centre was a *physical space* of interfaith activities, wherein conference rooms in the building were used for interfaith activities welcoming and open to members of all faiths. Notably, the doors or borders of the Sikh Nishkam Community Centre are open at an institutional level, even if the same doors are closed for inter-faith Sikh marriages.⁸⁸⁹

At an official level, frequent inter-faith events and activities like inter-faith weeks suggest that the official boundaries between South Asian faith groups and nationalities seem to break down in postcolonial Britain. At the same time, this interfaith cooperation does not hide the competitive element in the construction of places of worship as Hindus see the multiplication of architecturally distinctive Islamic and Sikh places of worship.⁸⁹⁰ Similarly, Aminah Mohammad-Arif and Christine Moliner argue that because South Asians have been encouraged to identify and mobilise along religious lines, British multiculturalism has propagated the politicisation and ethnicisation of these affiliations, in a way clearly reminiscent of colonial policies.⁸⁹¹ This is evident through instances like the Sikh Council of Britain's call for the establishment of an organisation that records

⁸⁸⁸ Singh, "Gurdwara and Community-Building among British Sikhs."

⁸⁸⁹ AFP/News Desk, "Armed Men Occupy UK Gurdwara in Protest against Sikh-Muslim Marriage," *The Express Tribune*, September 12, 2016. (Accessed December 10, 2016)

⁸⁹⁰ Nesbitt, "Locating British Hindus' Sacred Space." 200

⁸⁹¹ Aminah Mohammad-Arif and Christine Moliner, "Introduction. Migration and Constructions of the Other: Inter-Communal Relationships amongst South Asian Diasporas," *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal (SAMAJ)* 1 (2007): 1–22.

Islamophobic and hate crimes against Sikhs, similar to ‘Tell MAMA’ an organisation for Muslims in Britain.⁸⁹²

Encountering Nation and Religion

Walking down Ladypool Road in the afternoon, I notice that I am one of the few ‘Asian’ women not wearing a headscarf. After a few steps, the shops on this busy road seem to disappear. On the right-hand corner of the street, I spot a small *halal* butcher and grocery store called Frontier. Instinctively, I walk towards it to ask for directions to Stratford road. I am met by a warm, middle-aged British Pakistani man who owns the store. It is obvious to him that I am an outsider to the area. ‘What brings you here?’ he asks, ‘I am here to research Asian communities living in Birmingham.’ ‘Oh! Come sit down, what can I offer you?’ Surprised at my own lack of reluctance, I make myself comfortable on a makeshift chair.

Our conversation spans several topics including his life in Britain, a recent corruption scandal in the neighbourhood, as well as his travels and charity work in Pakistan. Just as he divulges the recipe for chicken *yakhni* soup, suddenly, his landline phone rings and interrupts us. ‘Give me two minutes, the call is from Lahore’ he says and excuses himself. Sipping the bottle of water he had given me, I listen to a language I cannot immediately identify. I wait for his call to end so that I can ask him. ‘Hindukosh’ he says pulling out an A3 sized map of Pakistan from his drawer. Referring to my research, I ask for his recommendations of places to visit on Stratford road. Tearing out an old yellow paper, he scribbles names and draws a map with directions. ‘I think you should go and visit the temple off Stratford road, there are many Hindus there, you will feel *more at home* there.’⁸⁹³ As I smile at him and stand up to leave, I begin to think more deeply about his suggestion and my own positionality within the spaces that I was researching. Why did he suggest the temple? What about the temple would make me feel more at home? What assumptions

⁸⁹² Hardeep Singh, “Sikh Lives Matter in Britain Too — Whether Sikh or Muslim, Racists Don’t Discriminate,” *The Telegraph*, October 19, 2015. (Accessed December 10, 2016).

⁸⁹³ Field notes

determine this suggestion? Was I out of place on Ladypool Road and Stratford Road in comparison to the Indian and Sikh dominated Soho Road? Could I tell ‘the difference’? What borders had I crossed, and had I done so knowingly or unknowingly?

Let us begin by unpacking the several layers of this unexpected encounter. First and foremost, it is important to acknowledge that the encounter was more likely in diasporic space, circumventing South Asia’s violent borders. Diaspora from both sides of the border can only easily encounter each other in diasporic space. Secondly, the subcontinental familiarity enables dialogue and exchange, that in many ways contests the rigidity of South Asia’s borders. However, the association of the Hindu temple with the Indian area outlines the clear contours of home and the imagined border for the grocery store owner. It marks the spatial and imagined positioning of Indians/Hindus as both national and religious identities in his imagined map of Birmingham. Additionally, it also brings to the fore the conflation of Hindu with India interlaced with the idea of ‘making me feel more *at home*.’

Interestingly, the grocery store owner is not alone in his assumption. Nesbitt, too, believes that ‘despite variations amongst temples across Britain, in every case the temple is evocative of India, whether the architecture is South Asian, the *murtis* are likely to be crafted in India, most *pujaris* are recruited from India, and the worship and socialisation conform to Indian norms.’⁸⁹⁴ She argues that ‘to a great extent then the *mandir* provides a public space that is an extension of India.’⁸⁹⁵ This arguably reductive conflation of religion with nation reinforces the post/colonial practice of categorising ‘the Other’ through religion, which in this instance is adopted by the diaspora too.

If the sacred space for Hindus is considered as synonymous with India, the case of Asian Muslims is not as straightforward. For Asian Muslims, the boundaries of the nation are overridden and challenged by the notion of borderless Islam. The Pakistani diaspora,

⁸⁹⁴ Nesbitt, “Locating British Hindus’ Sacred Space.” 203.

⁸⁹⁵ Ibid.

according to Werbner, has transformed themselves into the *Muslim* diaspora.⁸⁹⁶ Concurrently, 'being a Muslim diaspora is not an ontological finality for Pakistanis, it remains in tension with an equally compelling diasporic orientation towards a popular South Asian aesthetic diaspora: an aesthetic world embodied by the flow of mass popular cultural products from the subcontinent, and by a nostalgic reinscription in ritual and ceremonial of the pungent tastes and fragrant smells, the vivid colours and moving musical lyrics of a lost land.'⁸⁹⁷ In this way, Pakistani diaspora find themselves at the intersection of multiple subjectivities of different imagined diasporas, notably, the Pakistani 'nation', the Asian 'community', the Muslim '*umma*', and the South Asian 'diaspora.'⁸⁹⁸

Interestingly, for Bangladeshis, the tensions between Bengali secularists and Bangladeshi Islamists is more pronounced. The usage of mosques exemplifies a deeper tension that underpins religious beliefs and national belonging. Take the two mosques in the Tower Hamlets, the Bricklane Mosque and the East London Mosque, for example. Both are places of worship located within what is ostensibly Banglatown, yet they represent contesting identities. Momin Ahmed, who has lived and worked in Tower Hamlets since 1990 stated: '*We, who are in favour of liberation, go to Brick Lane Mosque. There are a number of mosques that are under the control of the fundamentalists. We do not go to these mosques. We avoid them. I think of Brick Lane Mosque as my own mosque. In the Brick Lane Mosque, I find Islam in the spirit that is liked by most of my countrymen – for example, folk-based Islam or Sufism. In this tradition, they obey pirs [saints]. In this tradition, people don't use the mosque for politics, they think of it as a sacred place. They use it simply for prayer.*'⁸⁹⁹ Momin associates the Brick Lane Mosque with the Bengali Liberation struggle and syncretic folk-based form of Islam that is practiced in South Asia, whereas in his view the nearby East London Mosque is closely associated with fundamentalism. In this way, the

⁸⁹⁶ Pnina Werbner, *Imagined Diasporas among Manchester Muslims: The Public Performance of Pakistani Transnational Identity Politics*, (Oxford: James Currey, 2002). 12

⁸⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid. 12

⁸⁹⁹ "Religion: South Asia," *Bangla Stories*, accessed December 19, 2016, <http://www.banglastories.org/about-the-project/migration-themes/religion-2.html>. (Accessed December 19, 2016)

urban public space within Tower Hamlets becomes an arena for contesting political and ideological differences between secularists and Islamists even as they vie for public funds.⁹⁰⁰

On the other hand, the women of East London seemingly challenge these notions of fundamentalism with their choice and usage of the mosque. Regarded as a modern space with equitable space for women's prayer and welfare services, Bangladeshi British women preferred the East London mosque and not the older, historic mosque in Brick Lane.⁹⁰¹ Halima Begum suggests that 'inequality in these women's eyes is associated with the older, nationalist space of the Brick Lane mosque which doubles up as a 'community' hub replicating social structures around *somaj*, *izzat* and *shorom* from the rural districts of greater Sylhet in North-East Bangladesh.'⁹⁰² Both these perspectives illustrate the borders that emerge within these diasporic territories. These spaces are *not just mosques*; their usage is political and make visible the borders between a global *umma* and a syncretic South Asian Islam, as well as highlighting the tension between boundaries of religion and nation.

However, what is more interesting about the case of Bangladeshi women is that it is counterintuitive and challenges popular narratives of Muslims in Britain. Begum argues that 'religion and Islam are valorised as fluid, 'modern', lacking boundaries, and with having limitless possibilities for these young women.'⁹⁰³ Here, women see the premise of the nation as oppressive, i.e. representative of classic South Asian parameters of *somaj* (society), *izzat* (honour) and *sharam* (shame) and suggest that it is religion that frees them from the oppressive structures of the nation that are reproduced within Brick Lane. These spaces also get coded with traditional values of both religion and nation. For instance, Nasheima Sheikh, a resident of Stratford Road who married outside the community to a

⁹⁰⁰ John Eade, Isabelle Fremeaux, and David Garbin, "The Political Construction of Diasporic Communities in the Global City," in *Imagined Londons*, ed. Pamela Gilbert (New York: State University of New York, n.d.). 163

⁹⁰¹ Begum, "Geographies of Inclusion/Exclusion: British Muslim Women in the East End of London."

⁹⁰² Ibid.

⁹⁰³ Ibid.

Welsh man, highlights the issues of being judged against her neighbours. She notes: ‘I think for many years I felt a bit slightly alienated where I lived because although there were a lot of Pakistani Muslims, I didn’t want to be judged... I’ve always kept a slight distance myself because erm I drink alcohol and they don’t and I eat foods that they don’t and so you know you just don’t want that sort of judgementalism, but you know if I need any help I could walk...’⁹⁰⁴ Nasheima, although a Pakistani Muslim, is bordered by her own choices and practices while also recognising the negotiability of this self-imposed border, and the possibility of seeking help from the community if needed. Nasheima’s example highlights the simultaneity of discomfort and comfort, and of belonging and un-belonging.

The tension between secularist and Islamist Bangladeshi is also manifested in rituals and practices. Let us take the example of the contentious Baisakhi Mela celebration that takes place annually in Tower Hamlets. The origins of the Baisakhi Mela or Bengali New Year are associated with Bangladesh’s struggle for independence, during which the Mela acted as a political movement, an outward and visible celebration of their Bengaliness and unity.⁹⁰⁵ To its critics, this is an inauthentic celebration lacking any essential community relevance and even reducible to an event influenced by Hindu/Sikh rituals and customs of Puja (festival of gods and goddesses).⁹⁰⁶ The celebration is performative, using music and food, and it occupies public space which makes it distinct from Islamic practices.

According to Waheeda, this festival is not religious but nationalist; she states: ‘again it’s nationalistic, isn’t it? They say they want to improve the area and make the Bengali culture more diffused...but you see why call it Banglatown? They promote nationalism and it stops the Muslims to think Islamically ... Muslims start to identify with Bengali rather than Muslim.’⁹⁰⁷ For Saydaa the global *umma* is more important than Bangladeshi identity; she

⁹⁰⁴ Nashiema Sheikh interviewed by Katy Wade on December 11, 2014 for My Routes project, Sampad archive. (Accessed November 15, 2016)

⁹⁰⁵ Eade, Fremeaux, and Garbin, “The Political Construction of Diasporic Communities in the Global City.” 165

⁹⁰⁶ Ibid. 172

⁹⁰⁷ Begum, “Geographies of Inclusion/Exclusion: British Muslim Women in the East End of London.”

claims that the Baisakhi Mela promotes nationalism which ‘is so destructive to the Muslims, that’s why I hate it so much, Muslims fighting each other, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Bangladesh, everywhere and it’s so destructive...’⁹⁰⁸

Sayda’s implicit universalisation of a Muslim *umma* that is challenged by nations and nationalism is not unique. After 9/11, many British-born second and third generation Bangladeshis and Pakistanis feel more Islamic than they do Bangladeshi or Pakistani. Many British-born Bangladeshis do not feel a strong bond with Bangladesh and feel disorientated, uncomfortable and out of place in the country, leading them to religion as a source of identity and certainty.⁹⁰⁹ Rapper, Kash Choudhary stated: ‘For British Pakistanis like me there is a gap. I don’t feel British. When I go to Pakistan, I don’t feel Pakistani. But I do know that I’m a Muslim – Islam fills that gap.’⁹¹⁰

This influences the way in which people self-identify but also everyday practices like veiling. For instance, Farzana cites an example where she felt like an outsider in Pakistan for wearing a hijab. She says, ‘When I went to Pakistan in September I was wearing a proper hijab and the people there were amazed. She’s wearing a hijab and ooh she’s from England. Ooh God. I did wear a dupatta and I did try to more or less even in the house to wear it but I didn’t feel as comfortable. And once when I was on the plane I decided I’m going to start wearing the hijab proper.’⁹¹¹ Farzana’s example draws attention to the differences in the practices of Islam by Pakistani diaspora and the practices of their contemporaries ‘back home’ in South Asia. Articulation of the diaspora’s identity is performed through practices that are more conservative, pronounced, and Islamic than those that are common back home. Similarly, Zeitlyn argues that increasingly, British Bangladeshi children and parents present the role of Islam in their lives as an uncomplicated

⁹⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁹ Zeitlyn, “The Making of a Moral British Bangladeshi.”

⁹¹⁰ Afua Hirsch, “The Root Cause of Extremism among British Muslims Is Alienation,” *The Guardian*, September 19, 2014. (Accessed December 14, 2016)

⁹¹¹ Fazila Bhimji, “Cosmopolitan Belonging and Diaspora: Second-Generation British Muslim Women Travelling to South Asia,” *Citizenship Studies* 2, no. 4 (2008): 413–27. 425.

distinction between halal and haram wherein morality and religion are not distinct from one another.⁹¹² The tension between correct and incorrect beliefs and practices - practices that are perceived to be rural Bengali interpretations of Islam, Sufi mysticism, or ‘incorrect’ are abandoned in favour of scripture based ‘deculturated’ Islam.⁹¹³

Conversely, in the case of Hindu ideas of purity, ideas about what is *pavitra* or *shuddh* (pure) are maintained but also renegotiated. Nesbitt cites the example of funerals wherein Hindus routinely go from the committal service at the crematorium to the temple without bathing or changing their clothes.⁹¹⁴ This departure from Hindu norms is attributed to the influence of Sikh practice in Britain, wherein the priest utters a mantra and sprinkles water over the congregation to render the polluted pure.⁹¹⁵ This shows not only that these conceptions of purity and pollution are negotiable, but that the boundaries between Sikh and Hindu practices are arguably fusing. Conversely, in the case of British Muslims, the boundaries constitutive of *haram* and *halal* are more strictly articulated. For instance, subtle boundaries between South Asians are also expressed through food, with restaurants that serve *halal* food or permit alcohol immediately marking a boundary between Muslims and non-Muslims.

‘Inherited antagonisms’ revived on diasporic terrain

Through the dialectic of fission and fusion this section will examine instances where the subtle borders between the Asian diaspora gain prominence or dissipate. The overarching narrative in Birmingham is one of diversity and tolerance, but scratching beneath the veneer of multiculturalism reveals several underlying tensions between South Asian diasporic groups which are concealed but also apparent. Drawing on Sikh-Muslim tensions, Katy

⁹¹² Zeitlyn, “The Making of a Moral British Bangladeshi.”

⁹¹³ Ibid.

⁹¹⁴ Nesbitt, “Locating British Hindus’ Sacred Space.” 203

⁹¹⁵ Ibid.

Sian identifies three roots to this antagonism, namely, historical tensions, the threat of forced conversions, and Islamophobia.

The historical tensions, specifically the Mughal tyranny during the emergence of Sikhism and the violence of Partition, form ‘inherited antagonisms’ that shape British Sikh-Muslim animosity. For instance, narratives about Mughal history permeate everyday perceptions, like ‘Aurangzeb was spreading the word of hatred and death so that Sikhism would be wiped out. Having failed to do so, Aurangzeb then moved on to getting his followers to rape and kill Sikh women whose families failed to convert to Islam.’⁹¹⁶ This also influences the idea of ‘forced conversion’ and sexual grooming in contemporary Britain wherein the Sikh community fears that ‘predatory’ Muslim males are aggressively targeting them with the intention to convert ‘vulnerable’ Sikh girls. A Sikh girl states, ‘Since I’ve come to university I’ve heard from my mates in Birmingham and Leicester about Muslim guys trying to convert Sikh girls, they’ve told me Muslim guys will go out wear[ing] the Kara and even wear a turban and have a fake Sikh name and then obviously when they go out they’ll chat to Sikh girls and stuff and then Sikh girls will obviously think they’re Sikh guys and slowly they’ll get manipulated.’⁹¹⁷

By posing as Sikhs using visible markers of Sikh identity like the *kara* or bangle, the turban, and the beard, as well as by consuming alcohol, they allegedly cross borders to *appear* as Sikhs. After 9/11 and 7/7, the issue of mistaken identity has rendered many Sikhs and even Hindus targets of Islamophobic acts and hate crimes. This has caused tensions and resulted in many Sikhs wearing T-shirts stating, ‘Don’t freak, I’m a Sikh’, to visually demarcate

⁹¹⁶ Katy Sian, “‘Forced’ Conversions in the British Sikh Diaspora,” *South Asian Popular Culture* 9, no. 2 (2011): 115–30. 14

⁹¹⁷ Sian, “Understanding Inter-BrAsian Conflict: Sikhs and Muslims in the Diaspora.”

themselves from being mistaken as Muslims. Such practices underpin and revive historical tensions that are transformed in the diasporic context.

Furthermore, Sikhs construct their identity in opposition to Muslims using narratives of Sikhism as an ‘egalitarian religion, encouraging the participation of women in the religious and social domains, banning discrimination against women, discouraging the practices of *purdah*.’⁹¹⁸ This framing formulates Sikh women as free, empowered and diametrically opposite to the oppressed Muslim woman who is subjected to practices like polygamy, veiling, divorce by *triple talaq* and so on.⁹¹⁹ Analogously, narratives of othering are also imported from the subcontinent and re-enacted in diasporic contexts. The othering of Muslims by Gujaratis is not novel, either in India or abroad, and they are employed using fixed and internalised perceptions of the Other like self-segregation and religious fanaticism. For instance, a Gujarati second generation migrant states, ‘I don’t have many Muslim friends...I have never had much in common with them [. . .] I think they are brought up to really prefer their own company and have a really bad attitude to other religions and cultures. I know that they don’t really like Hindus. They’ve brought their prejudices straight over from the sub-continent whereas we have had to mix [. . .] then these are just reinforced with whatever they’re taught in Mosques by their fanatical mullahs!’⁹²⁰

Hindus assert their sense of superiority and acceptance in British society in a similar way. A participant noted: ‘the Hindu religion [...] teaches tolerance. We are taught to respect other people’s beliefs and values, because this is the only way they will respect ours. We are not like Muslims who think their religion is the only religion and therefore have to go about trying to convert everyone. I have plenty of white friends who are really interested in Hinduism because of this higher level of spirituality.’⁹²¹ Countering such animosities and the myth of difference, Nashiema on Stratford Road cites examples of fusion. She notes, ‘I

⁹¹⁸ Christine Moliner, “Frères Ennemis? Relations between Panjabi Sikhs and Muslims in the Diapsora,” *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* 1 (2007): 1–18. 11

⁹¹⁹ Ibid. 11

⁹²⁰ Ramji, “Journeys of Difference: The Use of Migratory Narratives among British Hindu Gujaratis.” 710

⁹²¹ Ibid. 720

actually even know this Muslim guy and his friends who go for morning prayers at the mosque and then go to the Gurdwara for their food, so I think there's quite a lot of mixing.'⁹²²

The issue of marriage has always been intimately linked to migration and border crossings since the arrival of British Asian communities in Britain. The issue of inter-faith marriage makes visible the borders between British Asians. Most British Asian diasporic groups practice endogamous marriage as the norm, with exogamy being difficult to accept, particularly for the girl's family and community because South Asian women are the repository of the community's *izzat* (honour), and hence potentially the instrument of its defilement.⁹²³ Their male relatives are responsible for enforcing community norms and appropriate behaviour, and therefore upholding the borders of the community. Women tend to be protected, restricted and indirectly territorialised by their communities and bordered by their gender.

In this conceptualisation, the issue of 'our girls', forced conversation and sexual grooming is a major preoccupation for Sikhs who believe that empowered women are vulnerable to predatory Muslim men. For instance, a Sikh girl notes: 'I feel that to some extent there are stereotypes of Sikh girls as being quite unruly or wild, however Sikhs as a whole community are seen as big drinkers and perhaps this makes Sikh girls easier targets for Muslim men to convert because a lot of the times it is out in clubs or parties and probably when the girl is drunk that Muslims prey upon Sikh girls.'⁹²⁴ Dismissing notions of revenge

⁹²² Nashiema Sheikh interviewed by Katy Wade on December 11, 2014 for My Routes project, Sampad archive. (Accessed November 15, 2016)

⁹²³ Moliner, "Frères Ennemis? Relations between Panjabi Sikhs and Muslims in the Diapsora."

⁹²⁴ Sian, "'Forced' Conversions in the British Sikh Diaspora." 121

between Asian communities through marriage practices, Waqar Ahmed from Birmingham City Council claims, ‘that’s not true, young people just fall in love.’⁹²⁵

Rising numbers of violent incidents and disturbances at inter-faith marriages at Gurdwaras, particularly when female Sikhs are marrying non-Sikhs, indicates the closing of borders that underpins marrying ‘out’. Community fences of the Sikh diaspora are increasingly rigid as they no longer permit inter-cultural marriages on the premises of the Gurdwara. Sim Kaur, a Sikh woman who married outside the community asks, ‘Isn’t it better that we teach our partners and their friends and family about this ceremony and invite them in, rather than building a wall and creating a divide?’⁹²⁶ The border logic of inside/outside and maintenance of walls is explicit as is the territorialising of women and the preservation of the community. This reaffirms ‘the role and status of women as the embodiment of the nation, the symbol of culture and its borders, and the carriers and transmitters of cultural values.’⁹²⁷

Some also argue that ‘protesting is becoming an “identity marker” for young Sikhs to express their ethnicity and culture, they are, in effect, exploring where the boundaries between religious traditions and their British citizenship lie.’⁹²⁸ Conversely, according to Rimi, the boundaries of marriage for Bengalis in the UK are now more porous, reflecting changing attitudes towards women’s status, education and religion: ‘Now girls are studying, they are not interested in marriage. Even we see some girls [who] are over age, they are not married. Before, they got married early. There was a reason, too, they [parents] were afraid that their girls might marry some other people from another culture...Nowadays Indian, Pakistani, Turkish are acceptable as long as they are Muslims,

⁹²⁵ Interview with author, November 18, 2016, Birmingham.

⁹²⁶ Sunny Hundal, “The British Sikh Men Trying to Stop Women Marrying Outside Their Religion,” *The Independent*, October 4, 2015. (Accessed November 8, 2016)

⁹²⁷ Claire Alexander, “Marriage, Migration, Multiculturalism: Gendering ‘The Bengal Diaspora,’” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 39, no. 3 (2013): 333–51. 357.

⁹²⁸ Herpreet Kaur Grewal, “If Young Sikhs Protesting Interfaith Marriage Want to Assert Their Religious Identity, These Are the Battles They Should Be Fighting,” *The Independent*, September 14, 2016. (Accessed December 9, 2016)

because parents are more liberal.’⁹²⁹ It is worth noting that this is a porosity in terms of nationality and not in terms of religion, reaffirming that religious boundaries take precedence over national ones. In this sense, diasporic groups seem bounded and determined to maintain their community fences. Interestingly, as per anecdotal evidence, many more mixed marriages between Sikhs and non-Sikhs take place in India without incident, which begs the question of whether these borders are stronger in the diaspora.

Finally, it is also important to understand that diasporic space is not just a space of tensions and contestation. For instance, Waqar Ahmed, a second-generation British Pakistani and Prevent Manager for Birmingham City Council, challenges these inherited antagonisms, adopting the narrative of fusion rather than fission. For Ahmed, diasporic space enables encounters, reveals a shared subcontinental heritage, and fosters commonalities that are not possible in contemporary South Asia.⁹³⁰ He notes:

‘As second generation, I think a lot of the younger subcontinent heritage communities here are slightly frustrated and bored by the tensions between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. We can’t see why these tensions remain, there are many Pakistanis that would like to visit India and visit what they consider their heritage as well. And you’ll tend to find movies like *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*⁹³¹ have a lot of support outside of India and Pakistan because communities want to see this kind of coming together and friendship evolving. In a way being British and living here and living alongside from India and Pakistan gives us an opportunity to demonstrate that peace can happen, and that tensions are not there by doing

⁹²⁹ Alexander, “Marriage, Migration, Multiculturalism: Gendering ‘The Bengal Diaspora.’” 345-6.

⁹³⁰ Interview with author, November 18, 2016, Birmingham

⁹³¹ *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* is a Hindi film released in 2015 is a story of the journey of a mute Pakistani girl stranded in India back to Pakistan with the help of an Indian man. This movie was very well received by Indians and Pakistanis and challenged popular Pakistani othering narratives of Indian cinema.

that enables us to show in a microcosm an opportunity for India and Pakistan to say look, friendships can forge, this kind of religious ignorance can be challenged.⁹³²

Ahmed's perspective also reflects the ways in which second and third generations are further distanced and disengaged from the subcontinent and consequently may not view other South Asians with disdain. Ahmed's testimony also counters the argument that borders of the diaspora are not as relevant with time and perhaps are subject to change generationally.

Conclusion

Through an exploration of multiple forms and locations of difference – physical, categorical, and practiced – this chapter outlined the ways in which multiple, overlapping and contending borders of separation and difference emerge in postcolonial Britain. At the same time, the context of postcolonial Britain borders South Asian diaspora like Hindus and Sikhs differently, from the way in which it borders Muslim Pakistani and Bangladeshi. Hindus and Sikhs self-identify and reproduce borders of distinction to reconstruct borders between South Asian diaspora. Additionally, in diasporic context, the sense of territory and borders are material, embodied, and representational.

In conclusion, through this chapter one can ascertain the inescapability of the boundaries of nation and religion that are deeply embedded within the South Asian diaspora in Britain, exemplifying the underlying tension of the colonial and postcolonial. This tension between the colonial and the postcolonial is not simply a matter of temporal distinction but also a spatial and conceptual tension. In diasporic space, context gains predominance as it orients relationality and underpins historical linkages, continuities and ruptures. The borders of race and ethnicity are implicit within the British context and act as palimpsests for borders of religion, regions, nations and gender to surface at different moments. This illuminates the highly contextual and momentary, but nonetheless rigid, nature of these borders. One

⁹³² Interview with author, November 18, 2016, Birmingham.

could argue that British postcolonial diasporic space is a confluence of several factors like ethnic boundaries, the tensions between post/coloniality, and borders of religion, nations, regions that are negotiated, manipulated, and enunciated through practices, spaces, and encounters. In a similar vein Stuart Hall notes, ‘at different places, times, in relation to different questions, the boundaries are re-sited. They become, not only what they have, at times, certainly been – mutually exclusive categories, but also what they sometimes are – differential points along a sliding scale.’⁹³³

⁹³³ Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.” 228

Conclusions

‘Borders do exist. Yet, borders exist as meaningful elements in space precisely because they are imagined, sensed, felt: because they are believed...We are not only victims of the border, but producers of it. B/ordering ourselves and Othering the Other is something we do ourselves. Making a border, demarcating a line in space is a collaborative act. And so is the interpretation of it. The interpretation and meaning of borders are always open for reformation and transformation. It falls to ourselves to remap and redesign political spaces.’⁹³⁴

Henk van Houtum

This thesis has examined the relationship between borders and identity in postcolonial South Asia. It questioned the efficacy of the recent notion in critical border studies and IR that borders are no longer just at the border, that borders are increasingly offshored and outsourced.⁹³⁵ Simultaneously it also challenged the mainstream scholarship on borders in postcolonial South Asia, by disrupting the rigidity of the territorial border and its location. The questions driving this thesis largely emerged from the limitations of these two literatures. The thesis focused on the study of borders by posing a set of questions, it asked: i) How do borders work in postcolonial South Asia? ii) What happens to ‘the border’ the further one moves away from its original location? And finally, iii) What is the relationship between ideational and material borders? By creating a synergy between South Asian studies and critical border studies, this project sought to disrupt the border, its fixity and location within South Asia, and conversely, stabilise or impose a certain sense of identifiability on the seemingly vague, dispersed, ‘undecidability’ of the border in critical border studies.⁹³⁶ Principally, the thesis sought to readjust the conceptual over-emphasis implicit in critical border studies by taking a methodologically driven approach to the

⁹³⁴ van Houtum, “Remapping Borders.” 416

⁹³⁵ Vaughan-Williams, *Border Politics: The Limits of Sovereign Power*.

⁹³⁶ Parker and Vaughan-Williams, “Lines in the Sand? Towards an Agenda for Critical Border Studies.”

border and sharpening the conceptual nuances of the border in South Asian studies to go beyond conventional definitions of the border.

In this conclusion, I will first provide a summary of the thesis and then draw connections and analyse the three cases by weaving together insights from the three locations. The second section will expound the argument and key contributions of the thesis. The third section will discuss reflections on the research, and the fourth and final section will suggest some avenues for future research. Finally, this chapter ties the thesis together by outlining and identifying points of convergence between the three locations: border, city, diaspora. The fundamental aim of this chapter is not to neatly tie up loose ends and provide closure, but rather to use these insights to provide a starting point to continue questioning the relationship between borders and identity more vigorously, across locations, and in novel ways.

Summary

In chapter one, *Approaching Borders*, the critical overview of the literature demonstrated the contested, ubiquitous, and dynamic nature of borders as a concept. This chapter knowingly brought diverse and multi-disciplinary perspectives on the border together not with the aim of synthesising them but of taking ‘the border’ and its study in different directions. The chapter emphasised that there is no uniform way of thinking about borders. As a result, the thesis not only rejects the binary framework of inside/outside in IR but also bypasses the dichotomies within border studies. Put differently, instead of choosing between traditional/alternative, fixed/mobile, or material/ideational definitions of the border, in the thesis I worked with multiple and contending notions of the border. In that sense, the thesis does not espouse conceptual hierarchy among literatures but rather builds a conversation between diverse vantage points that are unified or maintained through a focus on the border as object, practice, process, and narrative. The thesis manages the relationship between the border as an abstraction, as a political reality, and as a site of field research through an awareness of the three dimensions of borders understood as epistemology, ontology, and phenomenology. Finally, the conclusion, reflecting the aims of the thesis more broadly, does not attempt to produce a new theory of borders, but rather

offers respite from the ever-growing conceptualisations of borders to momentarily re-evaluate ‘the border’ in South Asia and border studies.

In chapter two, *Border as Method: Sensitivity, Imagination, and the Stranger*, I established the conceptual and methodological scaffolding of the thesis. This chapter forms the backbone of the thesis from which the subsequent three empirical chapters are developed and grow. I adopt the ‘border as method’ framework because it offers the possibility of rescuing the border from its overly conceptualised and abstract renderings. In response to what Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary and Frédéric Giraut refer to as the ‘epistemological breakdown’ of the definition of the border, border as method brings ‘the border’ back to the conceptual study of borders.⁹³⁷ Taking the border as method, whereby the border and method are both considered dynamic and in conversation with one another, allows for the possibility of analysing the border in novel ways. Moreover, this approach also nurtures conceptual innovation by questioning existent conceptual understandings of the border that are seemingly fixed and conventional in postcolonial South Asian politics and borderland literature in relation to the border on the ground. Hence, by engaging in dialogue with the border and using the border as a laboratory, the thesis organically grows in its analysis from the border to the city, and finally to the diasporic context. The interpretive devices of sensitivity, imagination, and the figure of the stranger also provided a guiding principle for understanding how and where borders work and what they do. The subsequent three locations or substantive aspects of the thesis - the border, the city, and diaspora - all form parts of the puzzle that is incrementally assembled but also comes apart. Individually, and in unison, the three locations of borders and ideas of borders complement one another and refine our understanding of borders and identity.

In chapter three, *The Border*, the central aim is to understand how borders are created, upheld, and maintained at the border. The chapter asked how the border as a concept

⁹³⁷ Szary and Giraut, *Borderities and the Politics of Contemporary Mobile Borders*. 6.

translates on the ground? This chapter relied on the perspectives of those who uphold the border in the traditional/official sense, i.e. the Border Security Force, as well as the inhabitants of border regions who create their own ‘sense of borders.’ This chapter provides a fresh perspective on the border and borderland literature by understanding how the border transforms through everyday practices of border guards and inhabitants. Even though the chapter shows movements and transgressions, it saliently highlights the role or the work of the imagination in making, breaking, and upholding the border. In some ways, even the transgression of the border necessitates the work of the imagination, because the border must be imagined for it to be crossed. At the same time, it must also be imagined counter-cartographically to be transgressed. In other words, in stark contrast to the imagination of the border inhabitants or cattle smugglers, for whom the border is imagined as porous or surmountable, the BSF officer’s imagination works to uphold and solidify the imaginary line. This chapter drew from original fieldwork and engages with primary sources and the existing literature to demonstrate the centrality of the border and the imagined border in its traditional location. It found that the presence of the imagined/symbolic border and the robust figure of the Bangladeshi stranger foster competing imaginations of the border even at the border fence. Ultimately, this chapter demonstrated that even the physical border is imagined; that porosity and transgression are part of establishing the border.

In chapter four, titled *The City*, I problematised and questioned the notion of *chhota* or mini-Pakistans and the emergence of the border narrative in the city. This chapter critically examined the recent provocations in the South Asian borderland literature that draw connections among marginality, the location of the city, and notions of mini-Pakistans in Indian cities. It focused on Bombay’s journey to Mumbai to analyse how the nation’s borders travel within the nation to subtly and starkly shape the spatiality of the city. Unlike a typically divided city, the city of Mumbai provides a stimulating and unique understanding into the question of the border owing to the persistence of its cosmopolitan image. Through an exploration of the city’s history, the chapter explicated the relationship between contact and friction in the city. The chapter provided empirical evidence to demonstrate the consistencies and inconsistencies of borders and ideas of borders in Mumbai, as well as how ideas of borders are closely linked to identity that is contextual

and shifting but also rigid, particularly in issues such as inter-faith marriages. This chapter is also insightful in terms of using the border to illustrate how the figure of the Bangladeshi appears but also hides in the city. While it followed the communal divide between Hindus and Muslims to demonstrate the existence of mini-Pakistans in Mumbai, the chapter was not fixated by these borders but rather problematised and tested them. The link between the assumed physical and mental borders is produced or becomes articulated in daily life by forms of nationalism. Although communal divides may make ‘the border’ visible, or give birth to ideas of the border, ‘the border’ in the city is not defined by these simplistic and primordial divides alone. The inability to identify a singular border in the city highlights that cohabitation, proximity, and the overlapping identities allow for multiple ideas of the border to co-exist. Finally, the chapter underlined that the notion of mini-Pakistans and the omnipresent yet invisible figure of the Bangladeshi in Mumbai subverts the Westphalian project in postcolonial South Asia.

Chapter five, titled *Diaspora*, played on the relationship between diaspora and borders, and strove to underline the implicit borders that exist in the lived experience of the diaspora. In other words, it searched for the borders of diaspora to ascertain how diaspora perpetuates borders/boundaries. This chapter also aimed to grasp the workings of borders and boundaries of diaspora, in a context where the South Asian diaspora is no longer bordered by South Asia’s violent geography. As such, the chapter sought to uncover whether encounters between diasporic Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis produced a sense of South Asian solidarity, or whether it resulted in the hardening or loosening of borders. In other words: do South Asian diaspora exhibit a sense of the shared history/culture/identity? Have differences between South Asian communities become more pronounced in postcolonial Britain? This chapter found that a shared South Asian-ness or an idea of South Asia brought together but also kept South Asians in Britain apart. The context of diaspora allows for the intermingling of multiple and overlapping identities. Racial, ethnic, religious, and faith-based identities perpetuate boundaries and reproduce narratives and ideas of borders. Each community of South Asian diaspora – British Indian, Pakistani, Sikh, Bangladeshi, exhibited their own understanding of borders; but the chapter found that there is no equivalence of borders. Interestingly, when borders and ideas of borders return to the

post/colonial metropole, the ‘forms’ and practices of categorisation continue to work to manufacture potent divisions between South Asian diasporic groups.

The next section elucidates the connective threads that render the border identifiable and analyses the connections and continuities between the three locations and chapters.

Connections, Reflections, Arguments

In the opening paragraphs of the thesis’ introduction, I asked what brings the border, the city, and diaspora together? While overlaps and parallels among the three locations have been discernible throughout the course of the thesis, it is still important to draw out thematic connections more explicitly. In this section I will outline three thematic connections among the border, the city, and diaspora that enable us to tie these seemingly disparate locations together as well as lead to the key argument of the thesis. First, borders *are* territorial. They mark territory whether at the border between India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh; the imaginary line between or within neighbourhoods in Mumbai; or ethnic enclaves like Little Pakistan or Banglatown in Birmingham and London respectively. Territory can be marked by the presence of border guards, fences, border pillars, through mundane practices like creating entrance gates, political hoardings, using flags, religious and cultural symbols, and even by ‘cruising’ in cars to celebrate a cricket victory. The boundaries of imagined territory are associated with identity that creates and upholds its own forms of borders. In this sense, the work of imagination plays an elemental role in determining spaces that indicate often internalised senses of ‘this and that’ side. These notions span across scales: the border; neighbourhood; city; and nation. However, it is equally important to note that like borders, identity too is not fixed but dynamic, multiple, contextual, and even contradictory. For instance, the participation of Muslim men from Behrampada in right-wing Hindu dominated political parties like the Shiv Sena and the ‘Don’t freak I am Sikh’ t-shirts on the London underground tube that distinguish between racially ‘brown’ people using religion, are instructive examples of how identities can be performed and recreated counter-intuitively in response to a context. Likewise, from the perspective of border inhabitants, it is the Border Security Force (BSF) officers who appear as *bideshis* or

foreigners rather than the Bangladeshis on the other side, thereby challenging the established ‘lines in the sand.’

Undergirding the border or idea of the border is the persistence of territoriality. On the one hand, this persistence of territoriality - material and/or imagined – seems to sustain the binary producing, traditional or linear sense of the border that delineates or reproduces the border logic of this and that side. On the other hand, this persistence of territoriality also explains the ways in which territory is seemingly fixed but also mobile through the work of the imagination, the mobility of the stranger, and the notion of sensitivity. For instance, in the case of diaspora, this could be understood as the tension between hybridity and essentialism, what Brubaker refers to as the tension between boundary-maintenance and boundary-erosion.⁹³⁸ However, the broader implication of the persistence of territoriality undergirding the border, and the linear or traditional function of the border arguably challenges critical border studies scholars whose search for an alternative border imaginary has clouded the alternative manifestations of the ordinary or traditional ‘lines in the sand’ border. Put differently, the counter-intuitive question posed in chapter two *Border as Method: Sensitivity, Imagination, and the Stranger*: ‘what has not changed about the border?’ is very relevant. The answer to this question could very well be that undergirding the border, the persistence of territoriality and linearity give shape to ‘the border’ or ideas of the border across contexts, locations, and scales. In other words, I would argue that even alternative imaginaries of ‘the border’ display traditional tendencies or binary production, delineation, and division. Borders are fundamentally territorial, even in their imagined and de-territorial contexts, and their territorial logic of division/difference perseveres. However, it is important to be wary of the fact that these functions of the imagined border,

⁹³⁸ Brubaker, “The ‘Diaspora’ Diaspora.”

like the physical border, depend on the context and gain meaning in relation to, rather than standing as, absolutes.

The second thematic thread that connects the border, the city, and diaspora is the notion of sensitivity that is prevalent and identifiable across the three locations. For instance, the various cartographic anxieties of the Indian nation-state render its borders as sensitive. At the border too, the BSF *jawans* treat the border as sensitive, inaccessible, and even label certain areas of the border as ‘vulnerable’ or ‘sensitive’ to smuggling or infiltration. In the city, the term ‘communally sensitive slum’ is used to describe spaces where Hindu-Muslim communities are either mixed or segregated like Behrampada and Dharavi. These communally sensitive spaces are also infamously branded as crime hotspots and become targets for the police during incidents of violence, crime, or terror. In the diasporic context, ‘ethnic enclaves’ or inner-city enclaves are considered sensitive and are under increasing surveillance particularly given the current Islamophobic climate and fears surrounding ‘home-grown’ terrorism and British counter-terrorism strategies like Prevent that typify Muslim-dominated neighbourhoods. The varying reasons for sensitivity across these locations and contexts underline Jason Cons’ point that connections can be found between margins and margins.⁹³⁹ The vocabulary of sensitivity seems to run through these three locations in different yet evocative forms. In that sense, the marginality of the border, the Muslims in Mumbai, and the deprived inner-city ethnic enclaves converge in two ways. First, in terms of how these spaces are construed in relation to their context as marginal, marginalised, outside, or exterior. These articulations of exteriority continue to blur the traditional notion of inside/outside in international politics, particularly in South Asia. Second, the shared ideas or terms that are used to describe these spaces as crime-ridden, dangerous, illegal, and unsafe (particularly for women). One could also argue that the border or ideas of the border become identifiable across these contexts owing to a common or comparable visceral ‘sense of the border.’ Put differently, this sense of borders reiterates

⁹³⁹ Cons, *Sensitive Space: Fragmented Territory at the India-Bangladesh Border*. 148

the starting premise of the thesis: that borders should be understood as a multi-sited phenomenon.

The third and final thematic thread is identity. The figure of the stranger enlivens the saliency of identity in delineating and maintaining borders and ideas of the border. The figure of the stranger encapsulates strangeness and difference, whether that be at the border, in the city, or in the diasporic context. The figure of the stranger too is not fixed. It moves between the Bangladeshi at the border, in the city, or in the diasporic context, as well as the Muslim stranger who poses an underlying threat demographically or otherwise across the three locations. Central to this figure of the Muslim stranger is also the mechanism of counting or numerically producing the fear of the stranger. In other words, the post/colonial practice of the census and categorisation that is undertaken across locations tends to foster similar feelings of fear and insecurity. Identity politics like majority and minority relations plays a central part in not only defining and perpetuating the figure of the stranger but is often related to borders. For instance, the Director General of the BSF's concern about the demographic changes at the border is observable through beards, *lungis*, *burkhas* and number of growing infants. In the city too, the demographic threat posed by the omnipresent yet invisible figure of the Bangladeshi infiltrator, and more generally the notion of Muslim vote-bank, that is concentrated in and coterminous with mini-Pakistans. In the diasporic context, the inclusion of a religious category that is normalised through repetition in everyday forms of identification and practices like in filling forms reiterates the centrality of these categories and forms of categorisation. The tendency to describe non-white British citizens as British-Pakistani, -Indian, or -Bangladeshi enlivens concerns about multiculturalism, cohesion, and belonging in postcolonial Britain. Moreover, news reports suggesting the difference in fertility rates - whether in India between Hindus and Muslims or in Britain between Muslims and the White British population - also continue to fuel the fear of the stranger as not only active but also multiplying in numbers. In these ways, the lurking figure of the stranger - who is familiar yet strange - is necessary to manufacture and maintain the necessary demarcation between proximity and distance. The figure of the Muslim stranger is upheld based on enduring stereotypes like dirty, dangerous, terrorist, barbaric, and meat-eating. While in India the consumption of meat and goat sacrifice during

Eid celebrations are pathologised, in Britain the demand for *halal* meat in schools is viewed as threatening the British majority. For Bangladeshis, narratives such as infiltrators, cattle-smugglers, procreating, and deprived are employed conveniently and contextually at the border, in the city, and in diasporic space. The stranger or the figure of the Bangladeshi/Muslim stranger is identifiable through visible signs of strangeness like the infamous *char* culture at the border, through beards, *burkhas*, *lungis*, smells, signs, and quotidian habits that play a crucial role in pathologising and constructing *these* people through a certain gaze.

The Border



Fig 4.1: Entrance to gates to Bangladesh at Petrapole, West Bengal photographed from the Indian side

Source: Author's own



Figure 4.2: Entrance gates marking territory for the Hindu Ganpati festival in Mumbai's neighbourhood

Source: Author's own

Diaspora



Fig 4.3: Entrance gates of Banglatown on Bricklane, London

Source: Author's own

The question that seems apparent from these collective insights is the question of whether the border that connects these cases or locations is the same. This question leads to an issue worth elaborating on. On the one hand, to assert or seek singularity of the border whether conceptually or empirically goes against the grain of this thesis. Throughout the thesis, the central aim has been to demonstrate the interplay between the material and ideational forms of border that challenge the physical or traditional location of the border. Similarly, the exploration of ‘the border’- conceptually and empirically- is not to draw one clear line across these three locations but to complicate, multiply, and diversify the notions of the border. These connections do not suggest that there is one clear line or border that runs through the three locations. It is important not to force coherence or a link between these locations. Instead, I would contend that it is more productive to think in terms of convergences and divergences. For instance, the narrative of Partition, whether mobilised through the territorialisation and protection of Mother India at the border, or during issues of inter-faith marriages of Hindu and Sikh females in Birmingham or Mumbai, lends a certain sense of consistency to the ideas of borders across these locations. However, the problem of identifying this one strand to represent or explain the multiplicity of the border is also problematic and restrictive. What this strand of connectivity highlights is not whether this is the same border but, contrary to notions of borders as ephemeral or indistinctive in critical border studies, this thread of continuity indicates that borders can be viewed as long-lasting, durable, and resilient owing to the meanings imparted on them across different locations.

The question that is worth then asking is what makes these borders durable and resilient? Perhaps, to answer this question, I would point towards the nexus between ideational and material borders. In many ways, this not a causal relationship but a relation of co-constitution and co- production. In the quest of studying borders at their physical or traditional location, this thesis inductively gravitated towards working with the nexus between the physical and imagined border. This productive tension between the material and ideational has been instructive in terms of foregrounding a new outlook into exploring the question of border by demonstrating the subtle, stark, internalised ideas of borders. The notions buttress the view that in principle and in practice *borders work* in South Asia.

Further still, the notion of the border as an imagined line has a certain ‘stickiness’ that sheds light on an underexplored yet pertinent feature in border studies: the nexus between the physical and the imagined border. The imagination of the border, or what Arjun Appadurai calls the ‘work of the imagination’, sheds light on how borders work and travel through stereotypes and prejudice. Attention to the imagination is crucial to explore mental or cognitive borders that can be resilient as well as exclusionary through practices, narratives, and processes associated to a border. Furthermore, the question of the imagined border elucidates not only *how* borders are internalised, but also the rigidity of stereotypes and prejudice. Imagined borders not only illustrate the inner-workings of maintaining but also of overcoming borders and boundaries of identity.

Addressing the question of what happens to the border the further one moves from it is particularly interesting. The thesis finds that there exists a certain unity of concept that unifies the border and ideas of the border across its locations and mutations. Through functions, processes, and practices that are associated with the border, the city, and diaspora, the concept of the border converges and diverges without losing meaning. The concept of the border is like a Russian doll: when taken apart, stretched across locations, or when put together, it still appears as the border. This raises an interesting question: if one were to rearrange or reverse the structure of the thesis -- i.e. begin with diaspora and lead to the border -- would our understandings and conclusions change? In many ways, the structure and order of the thesis is the result of the border as method approach that is based on being led by the border that simultaneously highlights the centrality of the traditional form of the border. Beginning with the border at its traditional location serves two purposes: first, it directly addresses the issues of abstraction in the literature by bringing ‘the border’ back into question. Second, it argues in favour of the centrality of the traditional location in shaping border thinking. This is the case even though, as chapter three *The Border* demonstrates, the border on the ground is far from linear and in some cases, like the riverine border in Dhubri, it is fluid. It is also overdetermined to the extent of being unseen or domesticated in Karimganj. The fundamental point, however, is not that the border on the ground is multiple and ‘fragile’ and therefore insignificant, but that on the contrary, the border on the ground, in its traditional location and physical anchors the border’s origins.

The border on the ground still matters because it is from here that the ideational border or ideas of the border gain form and function. That leads to the question of whether the ideational border is a ‘traditional’/linear border? To some extent, yes and to some extent no; however, I would argue that the more interesting question is not about whether the ideational border is this or that, but about the efficacy of this imagined border. The efficacy and rigidity of the ideational border allows for the concept of the border to fold in as well as expand across locations. Across these locations, the border and ideas of the border change, mutate, and appear differently, but largely remain identifiable.

Argument

In conclusion, this thesis makes a twofold argument that addresses the methodological and substantive aspects of studying the border. This thesis argues that the novelty of studying borders is not in redefining the border, but by approaching the study of border in novel ways. It is important to re-evaluate the method and approach to the study of borders. In other words, the pertinent question for border studies is not what a border is but rather how does one approach the study of the border. Developing this initial argument further, the thesis provides an alternative approach by studying the border *as* method. Developing this framework suggests that borders are a way of knowing. Understood as an epistemological viewpoint the processes, practices and narratives of the border reveal nuances and complexities of the border. The border on its own is an underexplored epistemological and methodological location for conceptualising the border. In other words, by focusing on the border as an epistemological site, one gains access to aspects of the border that have thus far been overlooked owing to an overtly conceptual focus. Taking border *as* method realigns the abstraction of the border with the materiality of the border to provide newer insights into the border.

The second aspect of this argument suggests that the border as method approach underlines the centrality of methodology in framing and shaping the epistemology of the border, but more substantively it leads us to the nexus between ideational and material borders. This leads to the substantive argument that the ideational border plays an important role in reproducing the border. The idea of the border could be understood or expressed as

difference, prejudice, stereotypes, division, lines in the sand, or hyphenated identities. These ideational forms taken by borders all keep out or exclude in similar ways to the physical border or fence. Arguably, ideational borders are could be seen as more rigid and resilient across locations than the geographically fluid and porous borders on the ground. This thesis suggests that the fungibility of ‘lego-blocks’ is as important as the barbed-wire fence when we study borders. Ideas of difference located across scales, stemming from the neighbourhood, the city, the nation or the trans-nation – are ultimately what makes the border as a concept resilient and durable, as well as what gives it its meaning. The thesis finds that the border as an object, concept, and process in/of international politics is not only potent but also identifiable across the global, local, and transnational scales of everyday life.

Contributions

The thesis makes three key contributions. Firstly, the thesis contributes to the methodological understanding and approach to studying borders. It presents a case encouraging border studies scholars to rethink *how* we study the border. Further still, by offering border as method approach it demonstrates that alternative methodological approaches to the study of borders are not only possible but also insightful and novel. The contribution of this approach the border as method is important because it repositions and reprioritises the border, metaphorically and literally, in border studies. Furthermore, it contributes to the critical border studies literature by injecting a much-needed postcolonial perspective that emerges from the social, political, and historical context of postcolonial South Asia. Given that the imposition and experience of border is a peculiarity of the decolonial and postcolonial experience, insights from borders in and of postcolonial South Asia are important to develop and make critical border studies more inclusive. Additionally, the foregrounding and inclusion of the history of borders is also crucial in border studies to not only contextualise borders across locations but also trace continuities and disjunctures over time. Additionally, the project also contributes to critical border studies by highlighting the limitations of a security and sovereignty-centric approach and by reintroducing the question of borders and identity. Critical border studies cannot remain sanitised of the messiness of borders and boundaries but more importantly, of the complex

interplay between identity, borders, and the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. By going beyond security or economic bordering practices and including other forms of social, cultural, religious, and political practices, the thesis illuminates the layered, complex, and contradictory ways in which borders appear identifiable through practices.

Second, the thesis contributes to the literature on borders in South Asia, by offering new and alternative ways of imagining and engaging postcolonial South Asia by examining the borders of the region in an innovative way. The thesis demonstrates that the border understood as processes, practices, and narratives - provides a new way to discuss the complex and intertwined problems of identity and difference in and of postcolonial South Asia. This thesis uses the border – an issue of political conflict and debate in postcolonial South Asia - to challenge and by-pass understandings of South Asia through the security-centric lens of nuclear war, conflict, asymmetric power and hatred. Instead, the thesis tries to show the deeper and far reaching effects of what these borders do and how the notion of border conflict infiltrates the imagination and the everyday. It offers an understanding of the deeper, pervasive, and widespread effects of what borders do. It shows how the ideas of divisions and difference rely on the border language and logic and appear as pervasive and potent in their alternative imaginaries in locations geographically distant from the original location of the physical border. In other words, the thesis draws connections between the location of the border and the implications and effects of what the border does in terms of inhabiting cognitive space, creating and perpetuating borders in the mind that give meaning to the borders on the ground. To reiterate the quote from van Houtum at the start of this conclusion, this thesis contributes to an understanding of how the interpretations of borders are coproduced but more importantly, how these interpretations have political, lived, and experiential implications.

Thirdly, the thesis makes empirical contributions to the South Asian borderlands literatures and border studies more broadly. Empirically, the thesis provides original insights into the border between India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh from the perspective of the Border Security Force. It provides a fresh viewpoint on the border from the complex position of those who uphold the border. Substantive insights from fieldwork conducted at the border

with the BSF infuse new ideas and positionalities to the existing debates. Furthermore, rather than the usual focus on enclaves, insights and analysis of the riverine border particularly with regards to the *char* islands on the Brahmaputra too shed light on an extremely marginalised aspect of the border between India and Bangladesh. Border studies more generally benefits from the inclusion of the urban and diasporic contexts. Studying the city (Mumbai) contributes towards understanding the potency of what the border does beyond its location, as well as highlighting the correlation between ideas of nationalism, borders, citizenship and belonging in the city. Thinking of spatiality in the city through the intertwining of borders and boundaries shows how spatial practices of exclusion reveal the strength of enduring stereotypes in daily life. Engaging with the border in diasporic space is productive in terms of testing ‘the border’ and its ideas outside of the region but also in terms of questioning post-coloniality in the Western context. Although in Britain, questions of racial inclusivity are addressed through the language of social cohesion and multiculturalism, the idea of borders retains or re-introduces the question of inclusion/exclusion, identity and borders from a typically South Asian perspective. In some ways, it also confronts the elephant in the room not from the perspective of Asians assimilating into British society, but rather flipping this equation on its head. From the perspective of diaspora, it refocuses on the baggage of identities that the diasporic experience or category may inherently include. Methodologically too, the border as method approach, or being led by the border, provides a fresh view on existing questions and issues in border studies and could be developed and used to analyse other border contexts. The novel combination of sensitivity, imagination, and the figure of the stranger also allow for analysing and tracing borders that are sensed, felt, and experienced more viscerally. These interpretive tools widen our conceptual understandings of borders that include other forms of visibility and politics.

Reflections and blind-spots

Although the thesis did not originally seek to ask the question of how do we study borders, the process of trying to study borders resulted in trying to find a way of approaching borders. In that sense, I found it necessary to negotiate the balance between the border as a concept, an everyday political reality, as well as a site of one’s investigation. In trying to

manage these domains, I found that the most pressing issue is not defining what the border is, but rather how to approach the study of the border. The border is and remains a nebulous concept that is not only difficult to fix but also grasp. Therefore, what is important is not trying to fight or tame the nature of the border and its inherently mercurial nature, instead it is important to understand and work with it. While the border allows for creative malleability as a concept, when we choose to view or explain the border through a specific theoretical gaze or conceptual lens we obscure the possibility of grasping the conceptual iterations of the border that are implicit in its manifestations as objects, practices, and processes. In that sense, allowing for the border to lead its study foregrounds a study of the border on its own terms. The border as an epistemological stance is a valuable location of conceptualisation, if paid attention to.

Reflecting on the process of following the border as method in many ways meant leaving each location or case open to some extent. What ‘open’ means is that I often returned to the city (Mumbai), or to the border (Jammu) for more fieldwork and with different questions after having written up findings from either location. In that sense, I did not make clear conclusions and then move to another location, but returned and reworked my understanding and argument of the border based on insights from the other locations. This process of approaching the border as method is not necessarily clear-cut or traditionally neat but a continual process, like a Rubik’s cube, that one needs to constantly readjust to see different patterns. The process of a dialogical and relational approach to studying the border as a way of knowing required reworking and rethinking one’s underlying assumptions. In that sense, the thesis does not ask a singular or coherent question. The questions of this thesis have developed throughout the course of the process of following border as method, and in some senses emerged from inadequacies in the literature but also from ideas and insights from the fields. To some extent, the thesis did not ask an abstract research question but a set of research-based developing questions. What this approach yields is the possibility of asking more than one question, at the same time. It allows for

the project and question to dialogue and develop, leaving remnants of every questioned it unravelled.

To that end, at different stages I posed different set of questions. For instance, even though there is a set image of what borders look like, during my first few visits to the border, I began by asking what do borders look like on the ground? What are the bordering practices that take place at the border? Which actors are at the border? Thereafter, when taking the lens of bordering practices to the city for instance, I asked how do ideas or practices of the border in its traditional sense appear in the city? What sorts of borders are they? Initially the bordering practices associated with the notion of mini or *chhota* Pakistan and spatial practices of exclusions in the city seemed adequate but also simplistic. The subsequent journeys to the border and the encounter with the riverine border, as well as the repetitive narratives of porosity forced me to question the rigidity I had enforced onto the city. This led me to look for fluidity and fixity, and contradictions where the ideas of the border could be challenged. In the case of diaspora, initially I sought to ask similar questions around spatial practices of exclusion and neighbourhoods, however I found that in diasporic context, the spatial practices of exclusion do not follow the same pattern. While there may be an intermingling of religion with nationality of some sort, it worked in different ways in this context. For this chapter, initially, I asked how do ideas of borders between Indians, Bangladeshi, and Pakistanis work or appear? However, I found that even the border terminology in this context had varying meanings. Viewing these inconsistencies and contradictions as not a failure of the border but as its efficacy was only possible owing to the insights of the border at the border. In that sense, the changing questions, and the intermingling of insights from each case and location may reveal inconsistencies and present incoherence, but it is precisely this incoherence that this thesis aims to forefront. Borders are not clear cut, not even at the border. They are messy, contradictory, incoherent but what is important is that they are identifiable.

The choice of three locations, the border, the city, and diaspora, invigorated the thesis and illustrated *where* and *how* borders travel, but it is also true that each of the locations could very well be an entire research project on its own. However, since the aim of this thesis

was to follow the border as the method, as a way of knowing, the focus of this research implied a multi-sited approach to capture the fluidity and fixity of the border. That said, I compensated for the inability of spending desired time in each location by relying on other ethnographic studies that explored relevant issues in-depth. The vastness and richness of the sub-literatures that each of the cases unravelled were at first overwhelming, but hugely beneficial to address the multi-disciplinary nature of borders. While the thesis could be interpreted as Indo-centric, this was resultant of political and logistical issues. It was not possible to study the borders from the other side as an Indian citizen. However, this could be seen to the advantage for the project because the focus on India also acted as a form of grounding and managing the parameters of the research. Given the fluidity of the border and the border as method approach, a focus on India provided a frame of organisation and reference. At the same time, the inclusion of the diasporic location to a large extent tries to mitigate this aspect. The research may have benefited had I been fluent in Bengali, it would have been interesting to see how the borderless language of Bengali could have changed the way in which respondents at the border, in the city, and in the diasporic context would have related to this research.

The several serendipitous encounters, unexpected conversations, reports in the news and general political environment inevitably fed into the consciousness of this project. In some senses, the border did not feel contrived but reflective of the political present. This thesis is also reflective of and developed through the general political context of India since 2014, wherein the narratives of Muslim reconversions or *ghar wapasi*⁹⁴⁰ were surging, violence at the border has been increasing, as well as more violent manifestations of Muslim otherness such as lynching. Even in the diasporic cases, increased focus on everyday bordering practices, the narratives surrounding immigration and borders before and after Brexit, the rising community fences between South Asians, narratives of Islamophobia, inter-faith marriages between Sikhs and non-Sikhs, multicultural Birmingham voting in

⁹⁴⁰ Ghar wapasi (home coming) is the practice of reconverting Muslims to Hinduism. These activities are facilitated by the Hindu right organisations and have gained prominence since the new government came to power in 2014.

favour of Brexit, are all factors that also shaped the development of the thesis. In this sense, this thesis speaks to and emerges out of a certain political milieu that may or may not hold the same meaning in the future. This situatedness of the thesis could be considered as a negative because it may appear that in a different political climate these borders and ideas of border may not be as stark or discernible. However, I would argue that this change or the possibility of changing ideas of borders based on the changing political and social milieu is precisely what will not allow for any of these ideas to be fixed. In that sense, it is important to reiterate that borders *can* change, their mercurial nature should be highlighted rather than ironed out.

While the thesis benefits from the richness of different locations and scales, the changing positionality of the researcher in relation to the context also altered and influenced aspects like access and insights. For instance, after gaining permission from the Director General in New Delhi, the Border Security Force and the border both became extremely accessible in a way that was previously not possible. However, the official access was also laced with the official narrative of the border. This rehearsed and memorised official narrative, although informative in terms of providing details like the distance to the closest city, did not reveal much about the border as such. To counter this official narrative, I had to rely on more informal interviews, held in more relaxed contexts like drinking tea or during meals. In the case of the city, my position as a *Mumbaikar* posed limitations. On the one hand, my identity provided a sense of familiarity to the city and the context and led to viewing familiar spaces/places through a new lens as well as discovering previously unseen places. However, the challenge for me in the city was to unlearn and constantly question my inherent assumptions. Perhaps the greatest challenge I faced while researching the chapter on Mumbai was realising that I did not have to go far to find the border. Narratives and ideas of borders or bordering emerged in spaces that I was already familiar with and found to affect people or places that I already knew. In many ways, the ease with which I found the border— so intimate and proximate to my own life— is something that I found slightly unsettling and difficult. The ease with which these narratives were present, lurking and finding utterance only sporadically or in certain registers, was what drove me to understand this more. I found the tacit acceptance and legitimisation of the narrative around *ghar wapasi*, meat bans in Mumbai or even the border violence and narrative on Pakistanis —

most violent and difficult to come to terms with. The empirical evidence in chapter four *The City* is based on the work of scholars who are either Muslim and/or vocal and willing to express their views on Muslim marginalisation in India's current political climate. In the case of diaspora, the question of access and positionality was more complex. In some ways, approaching people to interview revealed my own diasporic stance, but at the same time, not being British *and* Asian also distanced me. The initial rejection or scepticism from potential respondents forced me to rethink how the border changes in form and meaning, which led to the realisation that it would not be possible to 'follow' the border or ideas of the border in the diasporic context in the same way as I had in the city. Once I discarded the notion of 'finding the border' in the same way, and accepted the limitations of my position as an outsider, I found that my own understandings of the border also changed.

This focus on the ideational border also made me cognisant of the possibility of contriving or forcibly inserting 'the border' or ideas of the border in an alternative context. Admittedly, for the case of Mumbai, particularly since the persistence of the border language and border logic appeared straightforward, the initial tendency was to equate, or at least draw a clear co-relation between the borders of the nation and the borders in the city. Initially, as I began tracing the connections between narratives and border practices at the border and in the city of Mumbai, I leaned to towards continuing to interpret these connections as 'the border.' However, as the thesis evolved, I relinquished this tendency to explain and identify these practices, processes, and narratives as the border, seeking instead to think of the border through complexity. I wondered whether in searching for the border in other locations, the definition or characteristic that I was relying on was in some ways 'traditional' or linear – the very ideas that critical border studies seem to criticise and contravene. However, upon further reflection, what this encouraged was not an outright rejection of the notion of the border but a reflexive rethinking of the border. In many ways, this 'traditional' understanding of the ideational border is what retains its border-ness. By conceptually sharpening my understanding of 'the border' based on insights from case studies on the border and diaspora, I began to confront my own underlining assumptions more critically and reflexively. This encouraged me to challenge the limits of my own argument. In other words, by problematising the border in the city, how it appears and

functions, I sought to challenge the simplistic view that equated ‘the border’ with its manifestations in the city. Looking then for contradictions and counter-narratives that subvert, transgress, and challenge the border, I was led to the understanding that the border through ideas, processes, practices may appear to be simplistically ‘like a border’, but in its functions, negotiations, and subversions are compound and nuanced. In many instances and serendipitous encounters, I found the language of the border employed unprovoked and pervasive pointing towards material, ideas, and hunches to follow. These unprovoked and punctuated forays of the border or ideas of borders not only reaffirmed the pervasiveness of the border, but in some ways, they encouraged me to capture perspectives that appeared nonchalant, intrinsic, and mundane.

New beginnings and avenues

This thesis opens several avenues for future research, methodologically and empirically. Owing to the multiple locations of the thesis that intersect through the border, there are several routes that one could take. For instance, beginning with the border in its traditional location, one could explore the respective ways that the Bangladeshi Border Guards and the Indian Border Security Force problematise the idea of the *same* border. For instance, one could pose the question of how the *same* border changes on the ‘other’ side? Is one side of the border mirrored on the other, or is the image wholly different? To some extent, this question has been addressed by Jisha Menon, who has compared and analysed the border performance of Indian and Pakistani border guards at the Wagah border retreat ceremony through the lens of mimicry. However, beyond border performances, the perspective from the ‘other side’ – Bangladesh and Pakistan- would be fascinating to discern. This would also be very important in destabilising the underlying India-centricism of this study and the scholarship of the region. However, this does not avoid the problem of an Indian national gaining access to Pakistan or Bangladesh’s border areas particularly Indian officials consider these spaces ‘sensitive’ for Indian nationals. Nonetheless, these are fascinating questions. Another aspect that the thesis touches upon but does not explore in greater detail is the role of the female BSF officers in the force and their individual relationalities with the border. Although I did conduct some interviews with female BSF

officers, I think the overall role of women in border keeping, making, and breaking could be interesting to pursue in greater depth to shed light on border making practices.

The connections between ideas of borders in other South Asian cities like Dhaka and Karachi too may well worth be exploring in detail. For future research, the research into the South Asian diaspora could be expanded with the inclusion of other cities in the United Kingdom like Bradford and Leicester or cities in the United States of America, such as New Jersey. Furthermore, what this thesis could not fully explore but could be very interesting to delve into are the Sikh and Kashmiri diasporic groups in Birmingham. It would be very fascinating to study the Sikhs particularly owing to fact that their homeland or Khalistan is an imagined and deterritorialised geography that is vivid in the diasporic context. In this regard, examining the ways in which Sikhs imagine their sense of belonging and idea of Khalistan and its borders would be worth pursuing. Similarly, in terms of the Kashmiris too, it would be fascinating to discern the multiple and contested ideas of Kashmir in the diasporic context, their everyday activism towards the Kashmiri cause and their British Kashmiri sense of belonging that may challenge the borders of the Indian and Pakistani nation-state.

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